

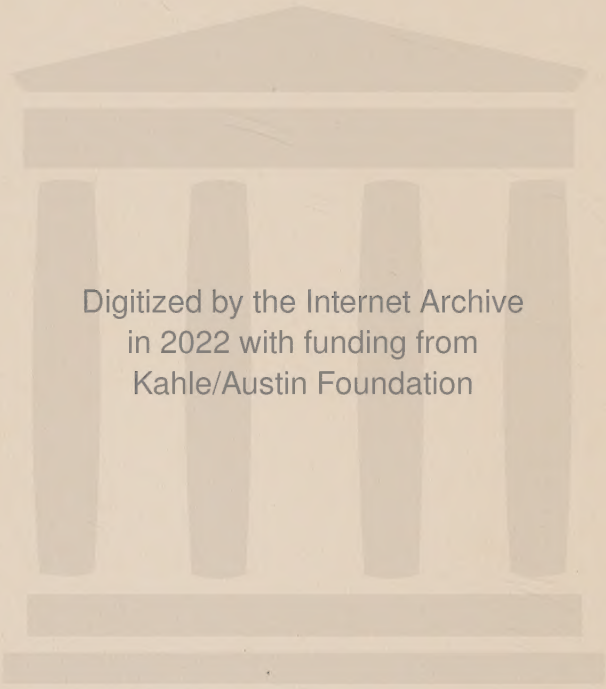
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YOUNG ANARCHY

PHILIP GIBBS

By SIR PHILIP GIBBS

YOUNG ANARCHY

THE RECKLESS LADY

HEIRS APPARENT

THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

WOUNDED SOULS

PEOPLE OF DESTINY

THE SOUL OF THE WAR

THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME

THE STRUGGLE IN FLANDERS

THE WAY TO VICTORY, *2 Vols.*

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

MORE THAT MUST BE TOLD

YOUNG ANARCHY

BY
PHILIP GIBBS

NEW  YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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YOUNG ANARCHY

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I

GOD is on the side of youth," said Miss Pomeroy. There was a moment's silence in her drawing-room looking on to the Knightsbridge side of Hyde Park. Miss Pomeroy's butler, who was a reformed burglar—she had rescued him from the free lodging-house in Walworth which she had established after the war—glanced furtively at the Bishop, lifted the cover from a plate of buttered toast, and left the room silently. The Bishop of Burpham, who was Elizabeth Pomeroy's brother, brushed a crumb from the silk apron above his gaitered legs and a faint smile touched the corners of his thin lips. His handsome face, with ascetic features and parchment-like skin, would have made a good portrait for a mediæval saint—Thomas à Beckett, to the life.

"I don't dispute that, Elizabeth," he said mildly. "But what I want to know, and gravely doubt, is whether youth—this post-war youth—is on the side of God."

"Certainly, poor darlings!" said Miss Pomeroy. "They're splendid. Frank and fearless. With a good lead and a little patience——"

"They alarm me," said the Bishop. "I might even say they terrify me."

"May I ask the cause of fear?" asked his sister ironically.

"They seem to me lawless, anarchical, and utterly lacking in any sense of duty and discipline. Take Jocelyn and Nancy—my own children, brought up in religious surroundings with a pious and admirable mother——"

"Yes, poor dear!" said Miss Pomeroy, with what seemed a touch of pity not quite in favour of her brother.

"I find them perplexing and distressing," said the Bishop in

a melancholy way. "Jocelyn's career at Oxford is disgraceful—no serious study at all, as far as I can make out. Worse still, he jeers openly at religion and expresses revolutionary ideas."

"It's the way of youth," said Miss Pomeroy calmly. "Growing pains, Rupert! I remember the time when you mocked at Bishops—as a curate with Socialistic leanings."

The Bishop ignored this reminder, except by a little gesture, waving it aside.

"As for Nancy," he continued, "she does nothing but read light novels and hanker after gaiety. She takes no pleasure in our quiet home life and religious duties."

"A little dull, poor child," said Miss Pomeroy. "The adventure of life calls to her. The spirit of the times——"

"They're evil times, Elizabeth. There is something terribly wrong with these young people of ours in every class of social life from top to bottom. What's going to happen to this England of ours I tremble to think."

"Pessimist!" cried Miss Pomeroy, laughing at him. "There's nothing wrong with England, Rupert, except the horrible mess we old people have made of it. I am one of those who want to give youth its chance. I believe in tolerance, liberty, humanity——"

"Much abused words!" said the Bishop impatiently. "Used as an excuse for loose thinking and false emotionalism. I believe in duty and discipline."

Miss Pomeroy made a comical grimace, from which it appeared that she did not agree with her distinguished brother.

"My dear Rupert, as you well know, you're an extremely intolerant man. I have the greatest sympathy with Jocelyn and Nancy."

The Bishop's face flushed slightly, and a sudden glint of anger flashed into his steel-blue eyes. But he controlled himself and spoke quietly.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Elizabeth. My tolerance is infinite with human weakness. I have no tolerance with the spirit of anarchy which is threatening to destroy this country of ours; none with the open immorality of post-war youth who are dancing their way to the Devil."

Miss Pomeroy said "Fudge!" under her breath.

"England," said her brother, "is reeking with Bolshevism. What is most tragic of all is the behaviour of women old enough to know better, who dress immodestly, behave with a total lack of decorum, and lead youth into paths of sin. How can we expect young people to be virtuous when their mothers and aunts—almost their grandmothers—go prancing about in places of pleasure, with hired dancing men and foreign black-guards? Rome in the days of her decadence was not worse than that."

It was Elizabeth's face which flushed this time.

"If that is an allusion to my recent holiday on the Riviera, Rupert, it leaves me cold. No doubt some of your old Cathedral cats have been babbling about my little jaunt to Beaulieu. It did me a great deal of good, and refreshed me for the work I try to do for my God and country."

The Bishop rose and glanced at the ormolu clock on the mantelshelf.

"I must catch the three-thirty train back, Elizabeth. Nancy tells me she is coming to stay with you. I beg of you to see that she goes to bed early, and does not indulge in too much gaiety. I object especially to those immoral plays which seem to be an epidemic in London just now, and of course I have forbidden all this modern dancing. You know my views."

"I certainly do," said Miss Pomeroy.

She spoke with a queer little sniff, as though ironical of his views, but then put her arms about her brother and kissed him on the cheek.

"You're a holy man, Rupert! I have the greatest respect for you. It would be a wonderful world if there were more men like you."

"Nonsense!" he said. "Nonsense! I try to do my duty, and it's very difficult!"

II

ELIZABETH POMEROY was one of those women whom England has always produced in large numbers, though their type, perhaps, is passing. During the war they were the steel in the spirit of the nation, pouring out their wealth, doing any kind of service, making every sacrifice for their men's sake. They served in canteens, organised Red Cross committees, did labourers' jobs in their own fields and farms, turned their houses into hospitals, made munitions in factories, pooh-poohed the peril of air-raids. In peace time one sees them about the English countryside in tweed skirts and big boots, with dogs at their heels, or in springtime on the Riviera climbing up into mountain villages where they startle the natives by their masculine appearance. They are the middle-aged women at whom all foreigners laugh, but who have a strength of character, an obstinacy of principle and an individual eccentricity which makes them a great power in English social life.

Good-looking at forty-five, Miss Pomeroy was a beauty in her time. Her portrait as a young girl by Lavery hangs in her drawing-room, demure, alluring, late Victorian. When one of her nephews—young Jocelyn Pomeroy—asked her why she had never married, she smiled at this portrait of hers under which the boy was standing.

"Oh, I've had my lovers all right," she said. "Some of them are rather fond of me still—but I fell in love with the wrong man, who happened to be married. Afterwards he became Prime Minister of England—oh no, you needn't guess which one!—and that's why your father is a Bishop—though I've never told him!"

I was one of those old lovers of hers who were fond of her still, though I used to chaff her about her political views and her Christian Science and that burglar butler of hers, and her

passion for fox-trots, and her philanthropic activities, which were only pandering, I said, to professional beggars and workshy young ruffians.

"Far better settle down and become respectable," I told her once. "You and I could live very happily together in a country house far from the madding crowd and all your parlour Socialists. It would save you a lot of money; and as a bachelor of good habits with novel-writing as an incurable disease, I'd make a very harmless husband."

"Humbug!" said she, tapping my hand. "You know if ever you do marry—and you're far too selfish to do so—it would be some little flapper with a knee-short frock and an Eton crop. I know you middle-aged bachelors. You're all for the young things."

"So are you," I told her. "You're a sort of universal aunt with innumerable nephews and nieces whom you spoil shamelessly."

That was true. During the war she had a canteen at Victoria Station, and was known as Auntie by half the British army, who sometimes wrote postcards to her from dug-outs and trenches before they were blown to bits or blinded or gassed. She loved all these muddy men—her boys, as she called them—and filled their pockets with chocolates and cigarettes before they went back from their seven days' leave.

I think it was their service and sacrifice which changed her political opinions and converted her from a rigid Toryism—her family tradition—to democratic ideas mixed up with Christain Science, devotion to the League of Nations, and an unreasoning affection for Lloyd George, until later she accused him of letting down the world. After the war she might have retired to her country house in Sussex, and to the birds and flowers she loved so much, but that was not Elizabeth Pomeroy's way. Her indomitable spirit would not let her desert the men who had saved England.

"They need our help more now than ever," she said.

That was during the time of transition, when there was a tidal wave of unemployment and when London was swarming with ex-officers and men who found it hard to readjust themselves to peace conditions, partly because their nerves were all

in tatters, partly because there were not enough jobs to go round so suddenly, and promises were unfulfilled, and men who had been very good as machine gunners or air pilots or platoon commanders or gunner officers found their places filled by the younger generation who had grown up in their absence; days, alas, of disillusion and despair for millions of men who found themselves on the dole, unemployed, and, presently, unemployable.

It was then that she started her free lodging-house in Walworth—it cost her a mint of money from first to last—and, as recently as last year, a club for working men in Battersea (the slum end of it), where she established a lending library for those who cared to read, and had Thursday night debates on social questions and Tuesday night lectures by various people from the literary and political world, whom she interested in this work.

As a novelist and playwright I was one of them, roped in for this service rather against my will, as I must confess, having an incurable dislike of public speaking. I was present, I remember, on the opening night, when Elizabeth, rather nervous and full of emotion, addressed a crowded assembly of ex-service men.

“Some of you men are having a rough time now the war’s a stale old memory,” she said. “People have already forgotten what you did for England in time of trouble.”

There was a chorus of approval, and one seedy-looking youth, who by his age had certainly *not* served England in time of trouble, and looked as though he had no intention of ever doing an honest stroke of work, remarked that “it was a blarsted shame too and ’Umanity had better take care, or they’d jolly well find out.”

“This club is a place of remembrance,” said Elizabeth. “Its doors will always be open to you, and there’s hot cocoa at a penny a cup and currant buns going cheap, and some nice-looking girls who’ll be glad to serve you as long as you keep your manners and don’t use bad language loud enough to hear.”

There was some laughter and considerable applause. Then, after a shuffling of feet, a young man who had been crippled in the war proposed a vote of thanks and said there were many

who remembered Miss Pomeroy in the days when she served the canteen at Victoria Station when the wounded came back to Blighty or the leave trains went away.

"Most of that is forgotten now, and better so," said the man. "The lucky ones were those who never came back to go on the dole and wear their hearts out, to say nothing of their boots. Speaking for myself, I've become a bit of a Bolshevik."

"Now then," said Miss Pomeroy hurriedly, "don't you go spoiling a good speech, my lad. The spirit of this club is England for ever and comrades all! I'm going to ask you men to sing 'The Long, Long Trail,' and we're all going to join in the chorus. After that, Lord Southlands, who has been very generous to this club—yes, you have, Tony, so don't shake your head like that!—is going to say a few words on the Spirit of Service."

My brother-in-law, Southlands, once Anthony Wingfield of the big engineering firm, twisted his grey moustache and fiddled about with some papers on which he had made the notes for his speech. He was one of those shy, serious Englishmen who always seem to preside at meetings like this and make intolerably bad speeches out of a high sense of duty. At the piano was his son Mervyn, a brilliant nephew of mine, rather too well dressed among these ex-service men in their shabby clothes, and looking bored—though a little amused—with the situation into which he had drifted through sheer good nature. After playing "The Long, Long Trail" with a touch of jazz in it, he slipped off the platform and joined me in the body of the hall.

"I don't think I can wait for the governor's speech," he whispered. "There's a limit even to *my* filial loyalty. What about a taxi-cab, sir, and a little drink at the journey's end?"

We slipped out like a pair of deserters, and I took him to my club, where he was good enough to give me his views on literature and art. I was conscious, humbly and respectfully, that he did not include my own novels in either class.

III

ELIZABETH POMEROY was at home to her friends every Wednesday evening after dinner—though I had the privilege of taking tea with her at other times—and it amused me to go round there sometimes and meet the queer company assembled in her drawing-room. Sometimes I wondered what her brother the Bishop would think of them all—Labour M.P.'s whom he regarded as traitors, short-haired women who smoked cigarettes through long tubes and had advanced views on social subjects, literary ladies who wrote naughty novels which I am sure Elizabeth never read, clergymen and Christian Scientists who worked in the slums and were all for Labour with a big L, and young people who had a habit of sitting on the floor and talking wonderfully amusing nonsense, and dancing at the slightest provocation to the music of a gramophone, after doing all sorts of queer jobs in shops and offices, and studios, owing to the social shake-up of the war, which had made their parents poor, and broken down, for a time at least, the old conventions of caste and custom.

Miss Pomeroy sometimes thought of her ecclesiastical brother among these protégées of hers not without a sense of humour—and, as I accused her, a twinge of conscience. At least I overheard a remark of hers to young Jocelyn Pomeroy, her nephew, and the Bishop's son, who had come down from Oxford for the week-end to join his sister Nancy who was staying with her aunt.

"What would your father think of my little party?"

The boy was standing with his back against the folding doors between her drawing-room and dining-room—a good-looking lad with his father's delicate features but with a ruddy glow of health in his cheeks and a humorous mouth.

"He'd think Nancy had come to Babylon."

He gave a smiling, ironical glance at a tall beauty whose

frock had slipped off one shoulder while she talked vivaciously with the aid of a cigarette in a long amber tube to one of Elizabeth's earnest young men. She happened to be my niece, Lettice Wingfield, for whom I had considerable admiration mingled with alarm. To my certain knowledge she was breaking the hearts of several excellent young men who spent a lot of money in taking her to night clubs and other places of entertainment for which she rewarded them with exquisite indifference to their rival claims. A thoroughly irresponsible young person, fully justifying, I thought, the accusations of Elizabeth's Bishop against the younger generation, although I confess she could twist me round her little finger. After a lingering glance in her direction, young Jocelyn's eyes roved to the contrast of his sister Nancy in an old-fashioned frock reaching almost to her ankles and the tiniest bit of neck showing above her lace-edged collar.

Elizabeth was amused by his answer.

"Oh, they won't do Nancy any harm!" she said. "Some of them are rather short in the frock—I'm getting used to it—but their hearts are on the big side, and their heads are screwed on all right."

"I'm not criticising, my dear Aunt," said Joceyln, in his airy way. "On the contrary, I was only thinking that Nancy looks rather dowdy to-night owing to my distinguished father's prehistoric views."

"Nancy looks delicious," remarked his aunt.

I thought so, too, especially when I had a chat with her. She was a finely-built young creature, with wonderfully bright mirthful eyes and an eager look, as though expecting great adventure.

"I hope you're putting in a good time," I said. "London must seem a noisy place after your cathedral city."

"I love it," she answered. "There are so many interesting people—especially at Aunt Elizabeth's."

She glanced round at the queer company, and laughed with her eyes.

"Mostly cranks," I told her. "Intellectual rebels who are paving the way for revolution in this misguided land of ours."

She wondered whether I was speaking seriously, and doubted it.

"That's what my father would say. But it's nice to meet them. All the people who are doing things. Up in Burpham we have to depend on books to know what the world is thinking. . . . Thanks for yours."

She spoke her thanks prettily, with one quick, shy look at me, and my author's vanity was flattered more by this praise of youth than by any review from elderly critics. But I pretended to despise the stuff I wrote, as we writers do.

"They're unreliable guides," I said. "Especially novels."

She gave me that quick, shy glance again, and did not believe me.

"I'm thinking of writing one myself! Only it's a great secret, and rather bold, anyhow."

"Bold—and dangerous," I said. "It's a form of infectious disease which is attacking many young women who ought to be warned against it."

"It's a way of escape," she said, after a moment's thoughtfulness, followed by a glint of merriment in those brown eyes of hers.

"From what?" I asked, rather startled.

Her answer was demurely said.

"My father's a Bishop."

I laughed at that. In four words she had told me a good deal to explain that early-Victorian frock of hers and the dullness of life in Burpham for a girl with a sense of humour and a love of London.

"Yes, I know that," I remarked. "I have a high respect for him. One of our great brains. Perhaps the only man in England who dares to tell the truth."

That seemed to please her, and she spoke loyally.

"I'm so glad to hear you say that. Daddy's tremendous as a truth-teller! I will say that for him. Only it's rather painful sometimes when Jocelyn and I—that's my brother, you know—are the subject of his truth-telling."

She looked round for her brother and saw him deeply engaged in conversation with Lettice Wingfield, that exquisite and dangerous niece of mine.

Then she turned and gave me a whimsical look, as though to say, "That brother of mine is asking for trouble!"

"Yes," I said, reading her thought. "That's my niece, Lettice Wingfield. You had better warn Jocelyn against her. She's a modern type of Lucrezia Borgia. She will steal his heart away and then give it to her lap-dog. That young woman is a danger to everything in trousers within a mile of her, including me. The money she costs me in theatre tickets and birthday presents——!"

Nancy Pomeroy was amused by these denunciations of my pretty niece, and looked at me with a new interest, I thought.

"Are you the uncle of Mervyn Wingfield?"

"I have that honour," I admitted. "My sister is his mother and worried about him. The young man is a frequenter of night clubs and knows all the dangerous ladies in London. As his uncle I'm afraid he'll blast my reputation one of these days. If you have any influence with him you might ask him to be more careful."

"He's very amusing," said Nancy, "and Jocelyn's greatest friend at Oxford."

"Your father wouldn't approve of the friendship," I told her, and she knew that I was not speaking quite seriously and yet perhaps with just a touch of truth.

It was Mervyn who took her away from me, laughing at my pretence of jealousy. It seemed that Miss Pomeroy's young people belonged to a mysterious society called The Glad Young Things, of which my nephew Mervyn was a leading spirit. As I knew, they made a habit of searching for "hidden treasure," which led them by various clues—heaven knows what—in tubes and buses and taxi-cabs to outlandish places like Whitechapel and Limehouse, where they refreshed themselves at coffee stalls among costers and night birds before they rounded up at some night club in Soho where they danced themselves tired. I was old-fashioned enough—alas, old enough!—not to approve of that form of amusement.

"Coming, Nancy?" asked Mervyn with his charming smile, in which I detected a touch of condescension to this pretty girl whose simple frock may have seemed as dowdy to him as it did to her brother Jocelyn.

"Is Jocelyn going?" asked Nancy, with what I thought was a touch of anxiety.

"Why not?" asked Jocelyn. "Lettice and I are going to lay the clues. By the by, do you know Miss Wingfield?"

He introduced his sister to my niece, and I saw Miss Lettice give a faintly amused smile at Nancy's old-fashioned frock.

"It's going to be great fun," she said. "We shall probably get as far as Houndsditch, only I mustn't give the secret away."

She turned to me with an alluring smile and said: "Coming, Nunky? You know you're tempted!"

"You're always tempting me," I complained. "You'll drag me down to infamy before you've done with me."

"You'd like it," she had the impudence to say, "if we went hand in hand together."

"La Belle Dame sans Merci!" I whispered. "Have a little pity for that boy Jocelyn there. He's much too young to be one of your victims, my dear."

"None too old and none too young," Lettice whispered back imperturbably. "And I love them best with curly hair like Jocelyn's."

"What's all that?" asked the boy suspiciously.

"A secret!" cried Lettice. "One day you'll know."

"To your cost," I said, grimly.

She gave me a mischievous look and kissed her hand to me, for after all we were great friends in spite of her naughtiness, or, if I am bound to tell the truth, because of it.

"Don't you children get into any silly scrape," said Elizabeth. "And don't keep me waiting up for you until the small hours of the morning—Jocelyn and Nancy, my lambs. It's not fair on maiden aunts."

"Why wait up?" asked Jocelyn blandly. "Aunts ought to be in bed at half-past ten, sharp."

"Not this aunt," said Elizabeth. "I've a good mind to come with you and study the wickedness of modern youth."

There was a chorus of "Come!" and Nancy Pomeroy seemed to express the general view that her aunt's company would add tremendously to the evening's fun.

"Duty first," said Elizabeth, glancing at a distinguished

Labour leader who was recounting his experiences of a recent tour in Czecho-Slovakia.

She held up a finger, and gave a warning to Jocelyn and Nancy.

"My dears, don't forget your father is a Bishop, and that I'm responsible—God help me!—for your moral well-being."

It seemed a great joke to that attractive brother and sister and to the company of the Glad Young Things.

IV

IT was about that time I managed to get a job for one of those ex-officers who long after the war still found themselves at a loose end and unable to make a place for themselves in civil life, until some of them took to crime and some to despair and some to a bed-sitting room hired for the night with a gas stove and a shilling-in-the-slot machine and a bolted door which had to be burst open in the morning. It was Miss Pomeroy who was the fairy godmother to Frank Hardy as to many other men of his age and class.

He was the son of an old friend of mine, Austen Hardy, the black-and-white artist, who was killed in an air-raid in London half way through the war. The last time I had seen poor Austen he had spoken about that son of his with a pride that partly concealed his desperate anxiety. The boy had been wounded again for the third time up in the Salient, but this time only lightly.

"Frank bears a charmed life," said his father. "His colonel wrote to me the other day saying what a splendid officer he is and how he inspires the whole battalion by his cheeriness and spirit. They always choose him for night raids. . . . I hope to God——"

He did not express this hope of his, and there was no need. But it was rather ironical that the boy should have come through the war while his father should have been killed by a million-to-one chance in his studio somewhere in St. John's Wood.

It was on the seventh anniversary of Armistice Day that I met and recognised Frank Hardy, after all those years that had slipped by so stealthily, and I blame myself now for having let him go without enquiring more closely into his way of life. It was when I stood wedged in the crowd at the Trafalgar Square end of Whitehall, waiting for the two minutes' silence. Far away over the packed heads of shabby men in civilian

clothes who wore their service medals, I could see the vague white stonework of the Cenotaph with its drooping flags. The omnibuses in Trafalgar Square had silenced their engines. The heart-beat of London had come to a dead stop and its rhythm of life was held up by some invisible hand, as though God had commanded silence in the City. One gun sounded in a muffled way. There was a flight of pigeons from the parapets of the National Gallery. Every man bared his head. It was the Silence, in which old memories of war, and death, and heroic youth, and human folly and the pity of it all, came surging into one's trance-like state. . . . What a mess we had made of it all! What ruin was still left! . . . Seven years of peace since then! Incredible.

It was when the Silence ended and a hymn was being sung by thousands of voices, and a band was playing somewhere near the King, whom none of us could see, that I became aware of Frank Hardy. He was standing almost next to me, with only one man between us. I saw his clean-cut profile, with sharper lines than when I had seen him last standing by the Lille Gate at Ypres, jauntily, with a steel hat on his head and a gas-mask on his chest. He was a boy then. Now he was a haggard-looking man, shabby, with an old overcoat turned up at the collar. Some mental telepathy made him turn his head sharply towards me and I saw that his eyes were luminous.

"Hullo, Frank!" I said. "I used to know you as a boy. Do you remember? Up in the Salient!"

We gripped hands and presently when the hymn was over moved away with the dispersing crowd.

"Lucky, weren't they?" he remarked, as though continuing some line of thought which had come to him in the two-minute silence.

"Who?" I asked.

"Those who got pipped. . . . Before—forgetfulness!"

There was no answering words like that. It was what the crippled fellow had said in Miss Pomeroy's club. It was the time of disillusion.... For those who remembered. I understood all right.

"Let's have a bite of lunch," I suggested.

He refused at first but I persuaded him to join me at a table in the old Ship restaurant at the top of Whitehall.

He was silent and moody for a long time, but towards the end of lunch cheered up over some brown sherry and showed a touch of his old humour and that smile which had always attracted me because of its boyishness.

"What are you doing these days?" I asked.

"Looking for a job," he said, and then laughed as though he saw a joke somewhere.

"Well, here's luck," I answered. "If I hear of anything——"

"Thanks!"

He smiled again and said: "Jolly good sherry, this!"

When we said good-bye outside the restaurant I asked him to give me his address and promised to look him up. I thought he looked a little embarrassed and I saw a slight flush creep into his cheeks.

"My address is rather uncertain for the moment," he answered. "I haven't settled down."

He hesitated as though about to say something else, then smiled, said "Thanks," saluted again with a hand to his shabby felt hat, and strode off into the crowd down Whitehall.

The next time I saw him was in Elizabeth Pomeroy's night refuge. She was showing me round and trying to persuade me to write something about it to attract subscriptions, and I confess I was conscience-stricken by the sight of these men, mostly young, nearly all of them ex-service men who had lined up for the chance of a free night's lodging with a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread. I spoke to some of them and said: "What about the dole? I thought all you men could get the dole."

"Not on your life, sir!" said one of them. "It's twenty-six weeks' regular employment before one gets on the dole. Twenty-six weeks—Christ!—why, I haven't had three days' regular job since I got demobbed six months after Armistice. No more have most of us."

Some of them were washing their hands, and some their socks, in a big lavatory with hot water—Miss Pomeroy's special pride. Others were dipping their heads in the basins.

"There's always hope as long as they keep clean and

smart," said Elizabeth Pomeroy. "I tell them that. I say 'If you lads once lose your personal pride it's all up with you.'"

She took me into the dining-room, with long bare tables and wooden benches. Some of her adopted "nieces" were putting out the bowls of hot soup and presently the men filed in and took their places—those young men who had been the heroes of the war—our "boys"—for whom we couldn't do too much, now caught between the wheels of industrial life in a time of trade depression and unemployment. Only here and there were men of older years—the old doss-house type which I had known so well before the war. I was filled with a kind of rage and soul sickness. I had seen these young men in the trenches, up to their knees sometimes in the mud of Flanders. I had seen them go over the top, crouching, bunching, running under storms of high explosives and towards the deadly chatter of machine-guns. I had seen them save the world, as we thought, by their valour and spirit in spite of all the blunders of the high command and divided counsels in high quarters which had wasted the glory of our manhood. They had been promised everything. . . . God, how soon we had forgotten! Here in this night refuge they had come for a free bowl of soup, one night's shelter from the rain and sleet, provided by a large-hearted woman who refused to forget, and shamed the rest of us—so many of us, and me.

"Yes," said Miss Pomeroy, as though guessing my thoughts. "What about the 'Homes for heroes,' and all the rest of it, eh?"

It was then that I saw Frank Hardy. He had taken his place with the other men at one of the long tables before a bowl of soup. He was chatting with his neighbours, two young men of Cockney type, with their hair plastered after washing at the basins. I saw him pull out a cigarette from his side pocket, and offer it to one of his companions.

"No!" said the man. "I ain't a cadger. You keep it, old sport."

"That's all right," said Frank Hardy. "I've given up smoking."

He turned his head as he spoke, and our eyes met. For a moment he dropped his glance as though pretending that he

hadn't seen me, and I saw a wave of colour creep into his face. Then as though thinking better of it he looked my way again and nodded with a smile in which there was a kind of defiance.

"Good heavens," I said, and went over to him and put my hand on his shoulder. "Frank, my dear man! I had no idea——"

"I told you my address was rather uncertain," he said, laughing rather nervously. "But this is a very good spot. I only heard of it by chance."

"Who's your friend?" asked Miss Pomeroy. "Introduce me, won't you?"

Frank Hardy stood up and said, "How do you do?" and bowed a little over Miss Pomeroy's hand—with a touch of his father's old-fashioned grace as I remembered it. I noticed that, and his frayed shirt-cuffs, and his blue serge suit worn thin at the elbows and knees.

"I'm sorry to see you here," said Miss Pomeroy, with a wonderful friendship in her eyes. "Down on your luck, eh?"

"Not altogether," said Frank. "It's luck to be here on a rainy night."

He didn't spend the night there after all. I took him home with me to my rooms in Whitehall Court and sent for a doctor, because he did something like a faint before sitting down to a late meal. I was a fool not to let him stay for Miss Pomeroy's bowl of soup. It was only that, as he explained to me in a shamefaced way when he sat up on the sofa.

"I'm frightfully sorry for making such an ass of myself," he said. "It was the smell of good food coming upstairs which did me in for a moment. I've been on half rations lately."

That night as we sat round the fire he told me something of his recent history. There was nothing unusual about it, except his good-humoured acceptance of hard luck. I had heard the same kind of story from other men of his age and type, sometimes from fellows who slouched up in the dark and said, "Excuse me, sir. . . ." He hadn't worried much after being demobilised and getting his arrears of pay and a bit extra. He had had a good time—until he became rather tired of sponging on old friends. Things began to get rather squalid when he had had to pawn some of the silver pots which he had won

when he was pretty good at the long jump. Other things had to go, of course. And meanwhile he was looking for a job in city offices, where he was kept waiting in ante-rooms with other fellows like himself, and nothing doing for any of them, unless they had a private pull. Ex-officer laddies were simply not wanted at that time of trade depression and social upheaval.

"Some of them are still odd-job men and damned bitter," said Frank Hardy with a smile.

"You aren't?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"It doesn't cut any ice. It isn't the fault of the Government or of the city magnates with gold watch-chains and callous hearts or of the Capitalist system or anything like that. It's just the inevitable consequences of a war that lasted a little too long, and rotted things up. You see, we fellows who went through it all had grown four years older without learning anything useful for peacetime jobs. We missed the boat, so to speak. The younger crowd filled up our places, and left us stranded. So it stands—and no use grouching."

"Can't you get any kind of job?" I asked. "A fellow with your education——"

"Winchester and Oxford!" he said, and I saw a laughing irony in his eyes. "Not much use for the drapery business, or sharp salesmanship behind the counter, or book-keeping in city offices, or even for rougher kinds of jobs down at the docks and so on. It's rather against one."

"Why?" I asked.

Frank Hardy was amused by my ignorance of social conditions.

"There's a lot of social snobbishness in the labour ranks. No gentlemen need apply. An Oxford accent creates hostility."

Still he had had quite a number of jobs of a temporary kind. He had been behind the pay-desk of a cinema at Brixton until the manager wanted the place for his nephew. He had also travelled in safety razors until his commission had dropped to less than the cost of new boots, laundry and other personal expenses. . . . Then there were other jobs, mostly unprofitable and not encouraging. For a month or so he had been at a loose end again.

For a few minutes there was silence in my room. Frank was staring into the fire, and the cigar I had given him—he hadn't given up smoking after all!—was tipped with white ash until he touched it against the fender rail.

"Sorry for inflicting all this on you," he said presently.

"I asked for it," I told him. "I wanted to know. And I'm extremely sorry, my dear fellow."

Hardy said something rather fine then. It made me like him a good deal.

"Oh, I'm more sorry for the men on the dole and the fellows who can't get it—the 'other ranks' as we used to call them. In the war the officer crowd died all right—in heaps—but they had a better time on the whole. Now, in peace, it's the men who get the roughest time again, now that British trade seems to have gone to hell. 'No hands wanted!' I've seen them staring at that notice with dull eyes after a five-mile trudge from a dirty doss-house. I'm astonished at their patience. I've almost tempted them to say something revolutionary or passionate, but they refuse to talk hot-air—most of them—and all the Labour agitators can't get a rise out of them. Sometimes I think they're too tame, until I marvel at their commonsense. We ex-officers have traditions behind us. Some of us have good friends. What have they got behind them, except foul little homes in slums that disgrace the name of England? It's miraculous that we haven't had a bloody revolution!"

For the first time he spoke excitedly, with real passion, forgetting his own distress because of his spiritual comradeship with that class and type of men whom once he had commanded in time of war, now down and out, or "on the dole," so many of them.

"I'm talking too much," he said suddenly, with real contrition. "It's the effect of your excellent whisky."

"Talk some more," I answered, but he pleaded weariness and went to bed, leaving me to rather gloomy thoughts.

England was going through troubled times. It hadn't been easy to get back to normal conditions, and something like a million men had never found work. Should we ever get back, I wondered, with melancholy pessimism, or had we lost our old chances, our old means of wealth, our spirit and tradition,

with all that young manhood which had gone down in the war? These unemployed men—fellows like Frank Hardy and his doss-house friends—showed that something had gone wrong. Devilish wrong. I hated to go about the streets now because of all the musicians and pavement artists and cadgers. And yet, behind that army of professional beggars—making a good thing out of public emotion, no doubt—were men like Frank, thousands of them, not parading their hard luck, hiding themselves.

I was an old-fashioned Liberal. I quarrelled with Elizabeth Pomeroy sometimes because it seemed to me that all this charity might turn us into a nation of paupers. I had written articles against the dole, and still believed—and believe—that it was a tragic and demoralising system which would sap the moral fibre of our manhood. As a writing man, outside the political game, a looker-on, though a lover of England, I was angry with the self-complacency of politicians who spoke easy optimistic words and hid the truth from the people—the truth that only by hard work, desperate economies, sacrifice all round, could we ever pay off the enormous costs of war and face the competition of foreign rivals, more laborious than ourselves, with a lower standard of life, with greater organising genius, perhaps, in the science of industrial life. I had no patience at all with the loose thinking of socialistic theorists; still less with revolutionary agitators who believed that by overthrowing the Capitalistic system there would be work for all, prosperity all round, a high level of equality for every servant of the State. Elizabeth Pomeroy called me a “crusted reactionary,” unjustly, because I was merely groping for the truth, wherever it might lie, with an open mind and infinite perplexity, and some hope in the younger generation. But Frank Hardy—that story of his—that scene in the doss-house, knocked me pretty badly. It made a mockery of all my platitudes. It shamed my own selfishness as a well-to-do bachelor, fond of the little comforts of life, busy with my novels, aloof from the hardships of the common crowd.

It was the next day that I went to see Elizabeth and told her about that boy I had taken from her lodging-house.

“Surely to heaven,” I said, “there’s a place for a man

like that? I can't rest till I've found something for him."

Elizabeth rubbed the side of her nose thoughtfully.

"I'll try that brother of mine! He's generous-hearted when one gets on his right side."

After all, it was Elizabeth and not I who found a job for Frank Hardy. The Bishop made a place for him in his library and I read the letter which conveyed this news.

"I do so purely to please you, my dear Elizabeth, and with considerable misgivings. From what I have seen of our ex-officers, most of them have a very elementary sense of hard work, and are lamentably inefficient. Most of those who had any quality at all have found work long ago. Still, from what you tell me, Mr. Hardy may be a brilliant exception. Let us hope so. I shall expect him on Monday.

"Referring to another matter, I'm afraid that Jocelyn has fallen into bad hands at Oxford. He seems to have established a strange friendship with a young Labour man who is tainted with Bolshevism. I am exceedingly worried, as you may well imagine. . . ."

Miss Pomeroy and I ignored that other matter—"that brother of mine has Bolshevism on the brain," she said—and we rigged out Frank Hardy with some new clothes. He was grateful, embarrassed, and shy in his thanks. When I saw him off to the north of England, I left the station feeling like a Boy Scout after his day's good deed, but, as it happened, it led to trouble for my young friend, to say nothing of the Bishop. But that was later on.

V

IT was at this time that Miss Pomeroy started the idea of a League of Youth.

"There's something in what that brother of mine says," she confided to me one afternoon over her tea-table. It was the afternoon of that day, I remember, when her butler, the reformed burglar, had a moral relapse and departed with most of her silver and a diamond brooch.

"On what subject?" I asked, helping myself to some toasted crumpets.

"These post-war boys and girls don't seem to be bothering to save the world at all."

"No," I remarked. "I haven't observed any indications of that kind."

She ignored my irony, as she generally did.

"All they think of is having a good time. I don't blame them, poor dears, after the war and all its horrors, which cast a shadow over their childhood. But if youth doesn't look out and get busy, there's going to be another war again, worse than the one we've had, and all their beautiful young bodies will be mangled and maimed like those who got caught in the last trap. . . . I went to a spiritualist séance the other night with Mervyn Wingfield, that brilliant nephew of yours."

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said. "If you take up spiritualism, Elizabeth, our friendship ends. That way madness lies, my dear."

"One must keep an open mind," said Miss Pomeroy. "And some people seem to get a lot of comfort out of it. Anyhow there was a medium there—Mrs. Sharples. All society is going to her. She made some astounding prophecies in the voice of a Red Indian chief."

"I know that Red Indian chief!" I growled. "Shameless nonsense, Elizabeth! The eternal gullible again."

"He prophesies Armageddon in 1928," said Elizabeth. "I'm getting scared. Some of my Christian Science friends have heard the same thing. Only a spiritual revival can save us from calamity. . . . I'm going to found a League of Youth and rouse the younger generation. I want you to help me."

"Nothing doing," I told her. "I'm working out a new plot."

"Now be good," she pleaded. "Tony tells me you've promised to stay with him at Southlands, and as your sister has asked me down it's a splendid opportunity for stirring up young Oxford."

I was fairly trapped this time. That brother-in-law of mine—Anthony Wingfield as he used to be before he took up politics and received his title for heavy contributions to the Conservative funds—had sent a message from my sister that I was booked to spend a week with them in their beautiful place near Newnham Courtney, a few miles out of Oxford. I had no notion that Elizabeth was to be there at the same time and could not find a ready-made excuse for dodging this new idea of hers.

"Young Oxford doesn't want to be stirred up," I said rather impatiently. "Young Oxford will jeer at you, my dear."

She was unconvinced and told me that she intended to make a start with her nephew Jocelyn, who was a brilliant boy with a great future in front of him, if he could escape from the fascination of lovely little ladies who liked his curly hair. She was a trifle worried about that niece of mine—the beautiful Lettice—with whom Jocelyn was spending too much time. They had been up to town together several times. He would get into trouble with the authorities at Oxford for neglecting his studies.

I laughed at her for this admission and pointed out the moral of it.

"Don't you see the absurdity about a League of Youth? What can youth do except fall in love and grope its way to knowledge by way of deplorable experience?"

"The spirit of youth is going to lead the world," said Elizabeth, in a mystical way. "England has fallen into the hands

of tired and corrupt old men. I'm going to found a League of Youth inspired by the spirit of service and looking forward with fearless eyes to some finer future than social injustice and world war. I'm terribly in earnest, John. We want a crusade of noble youth to blaze a way through this jungle of hatreds and stupidities."

Her brown eyes, so humorous sometimes, were lighted by a spiritual fire which rather frightened me. Because of my affection for this generous-hearted soul I could see myself being dragged into this hopeless quest.

"Crusaders never blazed a trail," I pointed out unkindly. "It's a wrong metaphor, my dear Elizabeth. And I can't see the spirit of youth leading the world from a night club in Soho. That's where I found your brilliant nephew the other night, with that abominable niece of mine, sipping *crème-de-menthe* ices at two in the morning and watching dancing girls with very little clothes on."

"What were *you* doing in a Soho night club?" asked Elizabeth suspiciously.

I had a complete answer ready for her.

"Studying life and the younger generation. It's my business as a novelist. And I don't like the look of it. These young people of ours are utterly lacking in a sense of responsibility—and abominably selfish. That precious nephew of yours borrowed a couple of pounds from me to pay for a car back to Oxford, and Lettice made me put her up for the night on the sofa in my study. Imagine the scandal when the woman came to clean up that room. My reputation——"

Elizabeth laughed at me.

"My dear friend, it's no use trying to do the heavy father part with me. You know perfectly well that you play into the hands of these monkeys and only regret that you're not young enough to share their adventures."

"*Touché*," I said humbly. "I regret my age."

"And I don't mind guessing," said Elizabeth, "that before Lettice tucked herself up on your sofa you made her some hot cocoa and discussed love and life with her."

"Perfectly true," I admitted. "And she told me that Jocelyn has fallen terribly in love with her and that she thinks

he's the nicest boy she has ever met, except six or seven others."

"Good for Jocelyn!" said Elizabeth, calmly. "It would make a good match. Jocelyn has all the brains and Lettice is going to have plenty of money. A charming arrangement."

"Lettice has brains too," I observed. "I will say that for the minx. I can't think where she got them from. Her father is a dear good fellow but I've never suspected him of high intelligence. He made a frightful mess of things as Under-Secretary for War before they pushed him into the House of Lords. As for my sister Helen she's one of the saints on earth, and they're not supposed to have brains."

"I agree with you about Tony," said Elizabeth. "I'm going to poke him up about the state of England. All this unemployment and the Government doing nothing whatever! It's heart-breaking."

My brother-in-law Southlands' house at Newnham Courtney was a fine old Elizabethan mansion with close-grown creeper between its Tudor windows and a small park beyond the flower gardens. As a boy I had often stayed there with Tony, who was then Anthony Wingfield, and it was in those gardens I had first met Elizabeth and fallen in love with her rather desperately, as she reminded me in her frank way when we met for tea on the terrace.

"Do you remember," she said, "that day—was it a thousand years ago?—when you kissed me behind that hedge down there?"

"You're a shameless lady," I told her. "You're the woman that wrecked my life, and you find it funny!"

"Not funny," she said. "Only a fragrant memory which I've tucked away in my heart like old Aunt Charlotte used to keep her ancient love-letters in rose-scented albums with faded photographs and pressed flowers."

She laughed and looked at me in a way that reminded me of her girlhood when she was a roguish thing and very dangerous.

"You were a nice lover," she was kind enough to say. "A pity we drifted apart like that."

"We're not so old," I remarked teasingly.

She sighed and took her hand away before I could raise it to my lips.

"Yes, we're old," she said, "we're old, my friend. Middle age and tragic memories have dug their claws into us. Do you remember the last time we were here? It was the night before the war—when you said there'd be no war, because you refused to believe in the madness of the world. Tony's eldest boy was with us—that handsome Harry of his, so noble-looking, so serious and fine. When that talk of war was on I saw Tony's gaze resting on his boy's face with a kind of frightful apprehension. . . . It was a foreboding. That boy has been dead eight years now, and I can hardly bear to go through Oxford because of all the young ghosts there, unnoticed by those who have followed them—and forgotten."

"Youth lives," I said. "England lives. Here come Mervyn and Lettice."

They came towards us with golf bags slung over their shoulders, and the sight of them was good to Elizabeth and me, haunted always by the memories of war, desperate in our different ways to save this younger crowd from what had happened to their elder brothers, and eager—weakly and pathetically eager, as I see now—to get some lead from youth itself, careless of the future, not bothering about the things that worried us, scornful of our apprehensions.

Mervyn advanced in plus fours and waved a friendly niblick.

"Hullo, aunt! Discussing the downfall of the British Empire—or the Dictatorship of the Proletariat?"

Lettice was good enough to present her cheek for a kiss from a bachelor uncle whose flat in town was very useful to her.

"No," said Elizabeth ironically, "we're discussing the decadence of the younger generation. I'm very angry with you for ridiculing my League of Youth."

"Well, it's wonderfully comic," said Mervyn, hanging his golf bag on a weather-worn statue of the youthful Bacchus at the top of the terrace. "What does Jocelyn think of it?"

"I haven't had the opportunity of asking him," said Elizabeth. "I'm going to invade his rooms to-morrow afternoon."

Mervyn smiled discreetly. I think he saw the comedy of that invasion.

"He's just the lad to go off the deep end and become a fanatical leader of forlorn hopes. Isn't he, Lettice? You ought to know."

He quizzed his sister with a humorous glance.

"He's not so old and decadent as you, Mervyn," said Lettice, with sisterly candour.

Mervyn lit a cigarette and threw one to her.

"I'm not so sure," he remarked thoughtfully. "For a bishop's son our little Jocelyn is not a model of simple faith. He shocks me sometimes by his rebel mind. I may be decadent—I dare say our blue blood is wearing a trifle thin—but I *am* loyal to our caste and country."

"Do you suggest that Jocelyn is a Bolshevik?" asked Lettice, rather warmly.

The elegant Mervyn was amused by his sister's touch of anger.

"I suggest that he plays with dangerous ideas and mixes with strange company. Not that I object. He's one of our brighter little humorists. But if I were you I wouldn't vamp him so excessively. The child is very young."

"My dear Mervyn," said Lettice, with exquisite nonchalance, "after a certain little episode with a married lady—old enough to be your mother—I should avoid discussions on high morality. They don't come well from you."

Mervyn flushed a little, knowing I think that I had been told of his somewhat passionate adoration of Lady Marjorie Eashing, whose husband was twenty years too old for her, though very good-natured.

"Young cats have sharp claws, sir," he said, turning to me rather self-consciously. "As a novelist you may have noticed that fact of natural history."

That afternoon my sister Helen took me into her little writing-room and we sat on the window-seat together looking out on to her rose garden. Mervyn and his sister were asleep in deck chairs out there.

"These young people!" said Helen, smiling at them. "What's to be done with them?"

"They'll do exactly what they like with themselves," I said. "And, after all, why not? I rather fancy we did."

"They worry me to death, sometimes," said Helen. "I lie awake at night, wondering whether I ought not to insist on more obedience and keep them on a tighter string. But it's no use! Lettice goes off to town and has her own friends up there. She tells me very little of her adventures and I can only guess—and pray. Half the undergraduates are in love with her, and lots of older men. She is perfectly frank about it all and I can't help laughing sometimes."

"She's a very intelligent young woman," I said. "I abuse her but I think she's fine and fearless."

"Fearless, yes," said Helen. "But what risks they take! These post-war girls think nothing matters as long as it's amusing. I think it's the fault of the fathers and mothers. Tony and I are tolerant to the verge of folly. I suppose it's the effect of the war. We want to take the shadow out of their lives and we remember that time of horror. We want them to have all the joy there is."

"It's better than intolerance," I said. "Elizabeth's brother adopts a different line and I'm not sure it's more successful. The time has gone by for parental austerity. The present generation won't stand for it. They just revolt."

"Perhaps so," Helen agreed. "I'm quite sorry for that boy Jocelyn. He seems to hate his home life. Mervyn tells me he has made friends with a Labour man at Oxford."

"What about Mervyn?" I asked.

She sighed and I saw a faint flush creep into her cheeks.

"We've had great trouble with him. That horrible woman!—Lady Marjorie Eashing. The poor boy lost his head over her. He's cured now. She ran off with a V.C. who acted as her gardener."

"Good for Mervyn!" I exclaimed.

We had no more private conversation, as my brother-in-law came in and called me away to his study.

"Have a cigar?" he said, in his abrupt way, which covered a touch of shyness.

I had a cigarette and listened to him for an hour while he talked of the political situation gloomily. I gathered from

him that trade had gone to the devil and that if things didn't improve before long the whole country would be bankrupt.

Presently he laughed and flung his cigar into the fire.

"Elizabeth Pomeroy thinks it is all my fault!" he said. "She has been giving me no end of a time. Says I ought to do something about it."

"Well, it wouldn't be a bad idea," I remarked, with a hint of sarcasm. "If I were you I'd make a start on the housing problem."

He looked scared and talked vaguely of the International situation. And then fell into silence, while dusk crept into the room. It was some time before he spoke again in a melancholy tone.

"The fact is, old man, we can't do a damn thing! Economic facts are too strong for us. We're all crippled by taxation to pay for the costs of war, and Europe can't afford to buy our goods at present prices. My trade—shipping and engineering—is all ends up. Nothing doing. I'm getting alarmed, for Mervyn's sake. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter much. We older folk can hang on with what we've made, but it's the future I'm worrying about. The chance for youth. What are they going to do about it, poor lads?"

"Gloomy talk!" I said. "England isn't done yet. Can't you get that Government of yours to pull itself together and get a move on?"

"My dear fellow!" he answered, and in the dusk of his book-lined room I saw an impatient gesture of his hands. "Governments can do nothing except talk platitudes, and hold on to office by throwing dust in the eyes of their followers. You know that as well as I do. I'm sick of politics. It's up to the people themselves and unfortunately they're all infected with this frightful Bolshevism."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "I can't find a trace of it."

"Then you're blind," said Southlands, with a touch of anger. "I see it all round me. They'd rather live on that damnable dole than work for an honest wage. They expect the State to keep them all. The Labour leaders are out for revolution and want to drag down everything in an almighty crash. I

won't be surprised if they do it. That fellow Ramsay——"

"They seem to me a moderate lot," I remarked. But he shrugged his shoulders.

"Our Intellectual theorists—those writing chappies—are the worst of the lot," he continued bitterly. "They pander to mob emotion and put false ideas into people's heads."

"I'm not one of them," I protested, with a laugh. "As one of the 'writing chappies' I object to that remark, old man."

"Oh, I mean nothing personal," he said hastily, and with a tone of apology. Then he laughed nervously and said: "That woman Elizabeth Pomeroy. I'm rather sorry Helen asked her down."

"What's the matter with her?" I asked. "You used to admire her."

He admitted that, but objected to her working-man's club and free lodging-house. He had been thinking things out. That sort of thing seemed to him all wrong now, though he had once made a speech for her. He had told her so and she had been very rude to him.

"The fact is," he said presently, "I'm getting a bit hipped in my middle age. I miss young Harry terribly."

He glanced towards the mantelshelf where, as I know, he kept the portrait of his dead son, though now in the dusk I could not see that young figure in khaki with his fine Lancelot face.

"Mervyn cheeks me," he said. "I've been too tolerant with him. He's been running into debt lately and getting into trouble with a married woman."

"There's not much wrong with him," I said. "It's just the adventure of youth. He'll shape out all right."

"As for Lettice," said my brother-in-law, "she frightens me to death. Nothing but gaiety and expensive frocks and objectionable young men. When I rebuke her she laughs at me and tells me I'm behind the times. Of course I love every hair on her head and can't refuse her anything, and of course she knows it, the hussy. . . . This post-war youth! My dear fellow, it's got out of hand. No discipline, no tradition."

The door opened and Elizabeth Pomeroy appeared, dressed for dinner already.

"Hullo, you two conspirators," she said cheerily. "What's the subject of your plot?"

"The same old plot," I told her. "Middle age accusing youth and putting the blame on to young shoulders. We're all terror-stricken."

"Ah!" said Elizabeth. "That's where my League of Youth comes in. I'm going to wake up Oxford to-morrow afternoon."

VI

YOUNG Jocelyn was surprised when his aunt descended upon him in his rooms overlooking the gardens of Magdalen, and although I accompanied Elizabeth I felt rather embarrassed and denied all complicity.

There was a group of undergraduates in Jocelyn's rooms, and I knew enough of post-war Oxford to distinguish them as the "æsthete" type by a dreadful suspicion of side whiskers and a look of intellectual superiority which was alarming to an older man like myself conscious of ignorance. I contrasted them, unfavourably, with that other generation I had known before the war, the elder brothers of these lads who had gone so gallantly to the fields of death, as I had seen them. Was it prejudice, I wondered, that this post-war crowd seemed to me less virile, less idealistic, more cynical about life?

"Jocelyn," said Elizabeth, after she had given him her cheek to kiss, "I'm afraid you're not taking yourself seriously."

"Heaven forbid!" said Jocelyn, with an uneasy laugh.

"Destiny," said Elizabeth, rather solemnly, "awaits the leadership of youth. Fate is calling, but you do not hear. I've come to tell you."

"My dear aunt," said Jocelyn, offering her a chintz-covered chair, "you startle me! If destiny is awaiting the leadership of youth, destiny is making a foolish mistake. Youth is otherwise engaged."

He introduced her, somewhat nervously, but with a fairly good mask of self-possession, to his group of friends, winking at them slightly behind her chair.

"Tremayne, let me introduce you to my aunt Miss Pomeroy. Ivo Tremayne, auntie. A decadent scion of our effete aristocracy. Over there is Arthur Lacey, who writes rather poisonous poems rather charmingly. That hearty-looking lad over there—now Bungo, behave yourself before a lady!—is

Stanton Shafto, the son of one of our most dishonest politicians and, like his father, a panderer to publicity. He had his portrait in the *Tatler* last week, after entertaining a disreputable journalist."

There were two others whose names I have forgotten, and they all behaved quite charmingly to Elizabeth, though I was aware of an exchange of glances which "registered" amusement.

"My dear boys," said Elizabeth, in her jolly, frank way, "this old country of ours is in rather a distressful condition just now. You know that as well as I do, if you read the *Daily Mail*."

"But, my dear aunt, we don't!" exclaimed Jocelyn. "Personally I read the *Daily Herald*, varied with the *Morning Post*."

"The old men who made a mess of the war," said Elizabeth, "are making a mess of peace."

"That's one against your father, Shafto," said Jocelyn.

"I agree," said Shafto calmly, and even with a touch of cordiality.

"It's up to you, boys," said Elizabeth earnestly. "What are you going to do about it? That's the question I've come to ask. Are you going to forget the men who fought and died to make a better world? Are you going to sit down in rooms like this—very charming rooms, I must admit—while this country of yours is going to the very Devil through moral slackness and utter carelessness? There's something very wrong with the world, my dears, and it's up to youth to put it right. Nobody else is going to, I assure you."

There was a moment's silence, almost awful in its intensity, among those young men who stirred uneasily in their chairs and gazed at each other with alarm. It was broken by young Pomeroy, who laughed quietly and addressed one of his friends.

"Give tongue, Tremayne! The charge lies against you, I think, as our most degenerate specimen of devitalised manhood."

"Personally," said Tremayne, after a moment's meditation of life's mysteries and Jocelyn's aunt, "I find it rather a jolly

old world, if you don't mind my saying so in strict confidence. I can't see anything wrong with it, observing it from this angle of comparative comfort."

"But my dear young man," said Elizabeth, with a little gasp, as though this answer had taken her breath away, "everything's wrong! Think of all those unemployed men of ours—those who helped to save England in time of need."

Young Tremayne permitted himself a faint smile.

"Lazy blighters, aren't they?" he asked languidly. "Not that I blame them for shirking work. It seems to be a necessity of life, according to my text books, but most unpleasant, as I think we all agree."

There was a subdued chorus of laughter, hushed by Elizabeth's earnestness, poor dear.

"They can't get work!" she said, with some emotion.

Tremayne searched his upper lip with a delicate hand for the faintest prophecy of a golden moustache.

"In that case," he said brightly, "I can't see why they're worrying. They're all on the dole, aren't they? What more pleasant than to be supported by the State with leisure for private hobbies and a bob now and then on the three-thirty?"

Again there was that faint movement of mirth among those young gentlemen who refused to take life or Elizabeth with that gravity she expected.

"Let's have your opinion, Shafto," said Jocelyn, turning to a fair-haired young man wearing the most extraordinary pair of trousers I had ever seen, being of enormous width and pinkish hue. He was the apostle of those garments known afterwards in history as "Oxford bags."

"As the son of a Cabinet Minister," said Shafto with extreme solemnity, "my opinions on political subjects are strictly private. I hope there are no reporters present."

He glanced round the room with mock anxiety.

"I hate to give my father away," he added. "I dare not bring the touch of truth to the falsity of party politics. Perhaps your aunt will hold me excused, my dear Jocelyn?"

Elizabeth looked from one to the other, and her face flushed a little when she was aware that they were mocking at her.

"Yes," she said, "I know you think I'm a foolish virgin,

and I'm not angry with you because you laugh at me a little. That's the privilege of youth. I've got a sense of humour myself, thank heaven! But I'm keen on an idea which I want you to take up. I'm going to start a League of Youth to revivify a tired old world. I want young men like you to have the courage of their convictions and give a lead to our muddled old age."

It was Jocelyn who took up this challenge, with apparent gravity, though I could see humour in his eyes.

"My dear aunt, you mistake the spirit of modern youth—if my friends will allow me to use that detestable word. They have no convictions. They are lookers-on at this rather ridiculous game called life, trying to find some clue to its tangle of absurdities, but very doubtful whether such a clue is there. They are amused and interested at times, but generally a little bored."

"Not at all," said Tremayne. "Always amused."

"Before the war," said Jocelyn, ignoring this interruption, "people believed in human progress—as I am told by my honoured father—and had a passion for reform. They seemed to think that education, science, and so forth would raise civilisation to higher levels and eliminate old cruelties and follies. H. G. Wells and others outlined the new Utopia. But that European brawl which cast a shadow over the innocent childhood of these effete young men knocked all that simple optimism edgeways. These men of post-war age—my unfortunate friends here!—have no faith in human progress or human nature. All that they hope to do is to have the best time possible according to their luck, and dodge if possible the damned unpleasantness which will probably hit them between the eyes when they least expect it. I speak as one apart from them, as the son of a Bishop."

Elizabeth looked distressed.

"Jocelyn," she said, "that's awful, my dear! That's the most dreadful pessimism I've ever heard. The world is doomed if youth thinks like that. . . . But it doesn't. My young men in Walworth are keen to make life better. Even Bolshevism, much as I hate it, is better than this blasphemy of boredom and disbelief."

"Sorry, aunt," said Jocelyn, with a touch of contrition.

A very young man at the end of the room spoke for the first time, turning with a pleasant smile to Elizabeth. It was Arthur Lacey whom Jocelyn had introduced as a writer of poisonous poems.

"You mustn't take Jocelyn seriously. It's only his pose, though as a matter of fact there's some truth in what he says. We *are* questioning things—everything. We haven't reached conclusions yet—how can we in this time of flux?—but one day we may get passionately convinced of some new faith, or hark back to an old one. Jocelyn pretends to be a cynic, but really he is a sentimentalist ready to go off the deep end at any moment. We suspect him of leanings towards Labour. There's a fellow he knows——"

"Good heavens!" said Jocelyn ironically, "our little Arthur speaks like a curate or a minor prophet! Even as a Bishop, like my honoured father. What's coming over the lad?"

Young Tremayne was trying to find his moustache again.

"I refuse to worry," he said. "I shall only begin to worry when I leave Oxford and face up to the grim realities of life with a lot of unpaid debts and an impecunious father. I shall try to get on the dole."

"About that League of Youth," said Elizabeth, coming back to her fixed idea.

Jocelyn laughed lightly, and the other men rose hurriedly, remembering important engagements.

"Let's go and have lunch at Fuller's, aunt," suggested Jocelyn. "They have some excellent strawberries and cream."

VII

I DID not go to lunch with Elizabeth and Jocelyn that day, having accepted an invitation from one of the Dons—an old friend of mine who had some very good port and a profound knowledge of eighteenth-century England—but I happened to meet the boy next morning and walked with him as far as Magdalen.

"How's that pretty sister of yours?" I asked.

He looked amused and said, "Do you think she's pretty? It never occurred to me. . . . Anyhow, she's bearing up against ecclesiasticism. I think that friend of yours rather eases the situation."

"What friend?" I asked, not connecting this remark for the moment with young Hardy, who was now assistant-librarian with this boy's father.

He reminded me.

"Frank Hardy and Nancy hit it off rather well. In fact I may say that they're both rather smitten."

"Good Lord!" I said. "That'll never do. Frank hasn't a shilling in the world, and no prospects outside your father's library."

"Does that matter?" asked the boy, with a humorous glance at me.

"Not enormously," I said, "but just a little. That enchanting niece of mine is rather an expensive young lady, isn't she? I mean when you take her to night clubs—of which I strongly disapprove—and borrow money to drive her home?"

He was pleased to laugh at this reminiscence, but did not show signs of being conscience-stricken.

"Yes," he said, "that was rather an awkward evening for me. You see, father thinks a fellow can live at Oxford on the same allowance as in his young days! Owing to the increased price of living that's obviously ridiculous. By the by, I hope

to repay that little loan one day, if you'll allow me, sir."

"No hurry," I said, and I saw that he agreed with me. "Meanwhile," I added, "I wouldn't go up to town so much if I were you, my lad, especially when the lady Lettice is anywhere about. It must take you away from your work, and you're too young to be made a partner of her adventures in night life."

"Thanks for the advice," he said with an affectation of imperturbable calm, though I saw a slight blush creep below his fair skin. "Advice is always so useful to the very young."

"Old age has its duties," I observed, and he was good enough to laugh at my sham senility.

It was at this point of our conversation that I saw him wave a cheery hand at a shabby-looking man on the other side of the road, and, knowing the snobbishness of youth and his reputation as an "æsthete," I was mildly surprised.

"Who's your friend?" I asked and shot another glance at the man. He did not look like an undergraduate. At least I had never seen one quite so untamed. He was a tall, sturdy young man of about twenty-three or -four with a shock of untidy hair, brick red, and a square ugly pale face. It seemed to me that he wore the last things in clothes. That is to say he had a pair of flannel bags ludicrously too short for his long legs, so that they showed his woollen socks above a clumping pair of boots badly down at heel, and a ragged old jacket positively out at elbows. Worst of all he wore a tie redder even than his tousled hair. A red tie in Oxford! I wondered he had the nerve to walk past Magdalen College or any others.

Jocelyn Pomeroy smiled at my question and then answered seriously.

"That's David Swayne, the son of the miners' leader. Rather a friend of mine and a future Prime Minister of England."

"You astonish me!" I said, and, suspecting a leg-pull from a young gentleman with a sense of humour, laughed loudly.

Jocelyn touched me on the arm.

"Look out, sir," he said anxiously. "He'll think we're guying him. He's frightfully sensitive, like those Ruskin College blokes who think the undergraduates have a supreme

contempt for them—which isn't true. Class consciousness, you know."

"Ruskin College!" I said. "That sounds interesting."

"Yes," said Jocelyn, "pretty marvellous, when you get to know about it."

I happened to know about it. Ruskin College is a sort of working-men's settlement attached to the University, but not quite part of it, although the students have the privilege of attending the lectures. It's an outcome in a way of old John Ruskin's sentimental and rather noble idealism, in which he tried to combine the dignity of labour with a classical love of beauty in art and life. He gave a demonstration of his philosophy in Oxford by getting a group of undergraduates, mostly belonging to the richer crowd, and trying to make a road which led nowhere, and had no purpose, and was never finished. Anyhow this working-men's settlement or training school was called after his name in memory of "Unto this Last" and other books of social enthusiasm. The students are paid for out of Trade Union funds, I believe, and are mostly young men of the labouring class who have been picked out for their intellectual abilities as young pups who may develop into Trade Union lions.

"I hope your friend isn't too Red," I remarked, when we were out of earshot. "When I knew Ruskin College before the war it was dominated by the philosophy of Karl Marx."

Jocelyn Pomeroy did not answer my question directly.

"David's all right," he said. "He'll go far if poverty doesn't cramp his style. He's a miner in private life—went down the pit at fourteen years of age—and may have to go again if he doesn't get a more agreeable job. Won't you come round and talk to him one evening sir? He often comes to my rooms if he thinks I'm likely to be alone."

It was an extraordinary friendship between those two—that red-headed, shabbily-dressed Socialist, speaking English with a northern burr, inclined, as I found, to be suspicious and sullen of strangers, and that charming and rather elegant lad who was the son of a Tory Bishop. I heard more about it that day from Elizabeth, to whom the boy had told the story with a touch of drama and a sense of humour.

Their queer comradeship had begun, it seems, in a fight, or rather, a series of fights. The Ruskin College men, suffering from an "inferiority complex," imagined that the undergraduates wanted to push them off the pavement when they met in the narrow streets of Oxford. Perhaps they did, but certainly the Ruskinites asked for trouble by linking arms and disputing the passage. Instant battle started, and there were skirmishes and assaults rather like the old "town and gown" riots of earlier days. Jocelyn Pomeroy, a good boxing man in spite of his delicate look, marked out for his special enemy the man he afterwards knew as David Swayne, that tall, scarlet-headed fellow with the hunched shoulders. They exchanged compliments with fisticuffs. Curiously, the red-headed man seemed to have particular antipathy to Jocelyn, whom he may have recognised as the son of the Bishop in his own "home-town."

"You'll be sneering once too often, laddie!" he shouted out one day when they met in a general scuffle.

For answer Jocelyn's elbow gave him a nasty jolt and he went staggering back.

"The humour of it was," said Jocelyn, describing the scene to Elizabeth, "that I wasn't sneering. I was rather afraid of that dour-looking laddie. I expect my smile was mere bravado."

But their friendship was really established on a night when Murdoch Wiffin the Labour leader spoke at the Town Hall on the subject of the Tyranny of the British in India. The undergraduates didn't like his title, or his previous reputation. They came armed with rotten eggs, bags of flour, stinking chemicals, and other emblems of disapproval. Meanwhile, the Ruskin College men had rallied round the Labour leader and formed a bodyguard—below the platform. Not one word was heard from the orator of the evening. He stood there plucking his faded beard and looking very scared, while the undergraduates made an infernal din with cat-calls, whistles, and Red Indian yells, before they began their bombardment, from which the Labour leader fled. Then, with a joyous shout of challenge, they flung themselves on his bodyguard, and drove them through back entrances into the street. The battle had

only begun. It was Jocelyn who led the assault on Ruskin College to which the enemy retreated in grave disorder, but with rearguard actions.

The Ruskinites resorted it seems to mediæval tactics. They flung down furniture from their bedroom windows, and poured jugs of water on to the heads of the undergraduates. But Jocelyn gained the cheers of his comrades by swarming up a drain-pipe and flinging himself through an open window. Alone he was in the stronghold of his enemies. . . . For a moment he was in an empty room, but as he advanced stealthily towards the door, it opened with a crash and he was face to face with the scarlet-headed "tough" whom he knew so well by exchange of blows.

"Clear out, or I'll throw you out!" said that representative of Ruskin College.

Another undergraduate—young Tremayne—had followed Jocelyn's example. Already he had a leg over the window sill.

"Rally up!" shouted Jocelyn.

But he went down under a smashing blow from the Ruskinite. He went down badly, with the back of his head against a wooden chest, and lay there senseless and rather dead-looking.

It was some time before he was able to observe the world again, and then he saw that he was surrounded by a gang of Ruskin College men, who looked scared. One of them was down on his knees with a sponge and a jug of water. It was the red-headed man.

"How do you feel, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Fine!" said Jocelyn, who felt like death. Then he laughed feebly and said, "For God's sake don't call me 'sir'!"

"I hit you in the passion of the moment," said the Ruskin College man. "I feel very bad about it."

"Not at all," said Jocelyn, courteously but languidly, as he told his aunt.

"It's an awful lesson to me," said the red-headed man. "It was the old ape coming out."

Jocelyn wondered what the man was worrying about.

"A fair fight, old man! You got your fist in first. Congratulations!"

"It might have been murder," said his late enemy. "And I'm a Christian pacifist. This kind of thing is all against my principles."

Jocelyn told his Aunt Elizabeth that he wanted to laugh, but couldn't do so without a nasty pain at the back of his head. For a pacifist, this conscience-stricken fellow was pretty useful with his fists.

"For the Lord's sake give me some whisky!" groaned Jocelyn.

There was no whisky in Ruskin College. They were all pledged to temperance, but they were good enough to send out for some. The siege had been raised after the undergraduates had made gallant efforts to rescue their leader. An hour later Jocelyn was led home by the man who had given him the knockout blow, and he noticed that his ex-enemy lingered for a moment before saying good night.

"I'd be glad to shake hands with you," he said, rather sheepishly.

"Why not?" asked Jocelyn, holding out his hand and wincing at the grip which closed on it.

"I've heard you in the Union," said the Ruskin College student. "Man, you can speak like Demosthenes himself. You'd make a grand orator—if ever you said a single word of decent truth."

"What is truth?" asked Jocelyn, like a youthful Pilate in plus fours. Then he changed the question and said, "Would you care to tell me your name? Mine's Pomeroy."

"I know," said the Ruskin College man, with unconscious flattery. "Mine is David Swayne. Maybe you'll hear more of it is future history. I've a terrible ambition inside me. . . . sinful, if it weren't for the love of learning and the service of humanity."

"Good luck to it!" laughed Jocelyn lightly.

The Ruskinite's face flushed for a moment.

"Yes, it sounds like self-conceit," he said. "I was a fool to give myself away like that. . . . Well, good night, and I'm glad I didn't hurt you much."

Jocelyn laughed again, rather ruefully, as he admitted.

"You did. Like hell. But I don't bear any grudge. Come round to my rooms sometimes, won't you?"

Swayne stared at him in a suspicious way.

"Do you really mean that? Or are you pulling the leg of a Ruskin College man, one of the lower orders, whom you despise so much?"

"Come to-morrow, my dear fellow," said Jocelyn cordially.

It was the beginning of that extraordinary comradeship—dangerous as it seemed to me, as I must confess—which was regarded as Pomeroy's crowning joke at Oxford.

VIII

JOCelyn'S particular set—literary and æsthetic—were highly amused, it seemed, when they saw the Ruskin College man coming out of their friend's rooms, hurrying past them sullenly when they exchanged sarcastic smiles. I was able to get at their point of view—which I wanted to know—when I strolled round to Jocelyn's rooms that afternoon and heard them discussing the subject with some warmth.

"Our little friend here," said young Tremayne, "is neglecting our ennobling company, sir, for an unkempt son of toil who dwells in a strange place called Ruskin College. We're peeved with him."

"I'm learning from him, sir," said Jocelyn, handing me an expensive box of cigarettes with a friendly invitation. "He knows more history than I ever cared to worry about."

"By our Lady!" exclaimed Stanton Shafto, the son of the Cabinet Minister. "The impudence of the lower orders is intolerable. What right have they to expose the ignorance of the privileged classes?"

His indignation was not wholly sincere, for he turned to me with a humorous smile.

It seemed that Jocelyn discussed other things with the red-headed man. Dull and squalid things like the conditions of life in English and Scottish slums—"perfectly ghastly" said Jocelyn—and the power of the Trade Unions, and the ideas of organised labour moving towards a social revolution which would establish equality of opportunity and equal pay for equal service.

"The man ought to be smudged out," exclaimed young Shafto. "Obviously an anarchist. Don't you agree, sir?"

"Very dangerous," I said. "I've seen that experiment in a country called Russia and it didn't seem to work."

Tremayne was good enough to give us the results of pro-

found meditation after an examination of his rather fanciful taste in socks.

"I cannot blame these laddies," he said in his languid way. "But I'm just a little anxious about their intellectual activities. What will happen to Us, my dear Pomeroy, if such ideas are allowed to spread? What will happen to me, with my distaste for squalid toil? Will they give me the dole, for instance? If not I shall be undone."

He was pleased with this point of view and gratified by the laughter of his friends.

"Seriously, gentlemen," said Shafto, with a comical imitation of his father's Front Bench manner, "I don't think we ought to encourage the Ruskin College brand of social philosophy, or pander to the vanity of one of its fanatics. This great Empire of ours, upon which the sun absolutely declines to set——"

"He amuses me," said Jocelyn. "And I'm doing a useful work with him. I've done something already to soften the sharp edge of his hatred—quite ferocious—for people like ourselves."

"Well, there's something in that," agreed one of the æsthetes, with a certain admiration. "If you can really tame the brute——"

"Besides," said Jocelyn, pausing to make a sensational statement, "I like his company. He comes from my village. We have much in common."

This remark was not taken seriously. It was received with light laughter as one of Pomeroy's priceless little jokes. It was impossible that the son of the Bishop of Burpham and one of the best-dressed men in Oxford could like a half-baked fellow with raw ideas and dreadful clothes.

"I like his fanaticism, sir," said Jocelyn, turning to me. "His passion for truth, his savage honesty, his self-denial for the sake of knowledge. It rebukes our levity of mind, our careless indifference to the grim purpose of life."

He smiled at the mocking applause which greeted these sentiments, and I could see that the boy was something of a humorist.

Then he raised his hand and spoke with a touch of sincerity.

"Would you believe it, those lads at Ruskin College make their own beds, wash up their own dishes, and cook their own food?"

"Disgusting!" said Tremayne, pretending to shudder at the thought of such squalour.

"Before Swayne came here," continued Jocelyn, as though revealing an unknown phase of life, "he worked at the coal face for eight hours a day, and then came blinking out of the damned darkness to gulp down a mug of tea and munch some bread and butter before sitting down to his books in a two-roomed hovel, with a grimy father tubbing himself in the front room and a frowsy mother spanking her squalling kids."

"If you go on like that," said Tremayne, "I shall burst into tears, old man."

Jocelyn laughed, and turned to me again.

"David Swayne is more interesting than the average undergraduates! I know them too well, sir—every pose, every insincerity. I'm getting a lot of fun out of contact with the primitive mind."

"Well, I must say you deserve a prize for your sense of humour, Pomeroy!" said Stanton Shafto. "Personally I find the proletariat most unpleasant. Their manners make me blush."

IX

DAVID SWAYNE'S manners were certainly not attractive. Elizabeth and I went round to Jocelyn's rooms on the following afternoon and found the Ruskin College fellow there—red tie and all—looking strangely out of place in a big chintz-covered chair by a little table supporting a marble statue of a dancing nymph. With his red hair in disorder, as though he had just thrust his hands through it, and his baggy trousers half way up to his knees, the young miner looked an extraordinary contrast to Jocelyn in whitey flannels and a college blazer with brass buttons. The Ruskinite was talking excitedly when we came in—something about art being the vicious luxury of the idle rich—but he dried up completely when we entered and looked hopelessly embarrassed.

Jocelyn introduced us in his charming way, and I could see that Elizabeth was immediately taken by her nephew's protégé.

"So you come from Burpham!" she exclaimed. "My brother is Bishop up there. I expect you think he's a most reactionary old gentleman?"

The Ruskin College fellow smiled, blushed rather deeply but remained silent, and glanced sideways at Jocelyn.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of me!" said Elizabeth. "I'm on the side of democracy. You must come to my working-man's club one day. Free speech and no censorship!"

"I've told him all about it," said Jocelyn. "And if you want an organising secretary for your League of Youth, aunt, here's the very man."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Elizabeth, smiling at David Swayne in her friendly way. "Anyhow I'm sure he would take it more seriously than some of you young cynics. How does the idea appeal to you, Mr. Swayne?—I mean a League of Youth for the spiritual revival of England, and the closer

union of the classes in comradeship and service. Jocelyn jeers at me but I refuse to be discouraged."

"It wouldn't work," said Swayne, rather sullenly I thought. "There can be no union of classes. The gulf is too wide."

Jocelyn permitted himself a faint smile in my direction, but further argument was postponed owing to the arrival of my alarming niece, exquisitely dressed, perfectly self-possessed, although I am certain that she had expected to find Jocelyn alone in his rooms.

"Hope I'm not intruding!" she said, with a smiling glance round the room. "I had no idea that Jocelyn was giving a party. I just drove over in Mervyn's two-seater to borrow a book on Roman history."

She ignored our derisive laughter and Jocelyn's blushes. Those dangerous eyes of hers, so alluring to youth—and old age—studied the Ruskin College fellow for a moment, and took him all in with one quick look from clumping boots to brick-red hair. Almost imperceptibly she raised her eyebrows and I caught the meaning of her glance.

"What an extraordinary person to find in Jocelyn's rooms!"

Young Pomeroy introduced them, rather nervously I thought.

"This is Mr. Swayne of Ruskin College. A great friend of mine. Miss Lettice Wingfield, old man."

Swayne had already risen. His pale face flushed painfully and he looked extremely frightened of this elegant young woman who had suddenly appeared.

"How do you do?" asked Lettice, holding out her little gloved hand very graciously.

Swayne hesitated for a moment before taking her hand in his bony paw.

"Nicely, thank you," he answered in a sheepish way.

We felt sorry for him—at least I did—especially as Lettice did not disguise her amusement and kept breaking out into ripples of laughter without reason. The Ruskin College young man guessed that she was laughing at him and looked moody and ill-tempered.

It was Elizabeth who saved the situation by her good-

natured way, asking him a number of questions to draw him out, and ignoring his distress.

How did he like Oxford? Was he fond of modern poetry? Was he a contributor to the *Isis*? Did he ever speak in the Union?

Swayne stammered out brief answers, helped out by Jocelyn, who assured his aunt that Mr. Swayne had made a tremendous hit at the Union when invited to defend the Labour point of view.

"Is there any defence?" asked Lettice, with assumed innocence.

"Hush, child!" said Elizabeth, rather sharply. "Don't display your ignorance on serious subjects."

Swayne rose abruptly, saying something about work to do, and at the same time upsetting his cup of tea so that it splashed on to Lettice's silk frock and made her give a little scream of dismay.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said the Ruskin College man, blushing vividly. "I'm a clumsy lout, as you can well see. If you care to use this handkerchief——"

He pulled a grubby rag from his jacket pocket and stooped to wipe the tea off the girl's frock.

For a moment that niece of mine looked aghast at that well-used handkerchief, but then, because of Swayne's painful embarrassment and a touch of pity for him which made me rather pleased with her, she laughed and answered gallantly.

"Don't bother! It will dry in a second. I shan't need your handkerchief, thanks very much."

"I'll say good-bye," said Swayne. "I've three hours' reading to do. So if you'll excuse me, Pomeroy——"

He strode out of the room with his face still flushed, and as soon as the door closed Lettice gave a ripple of laughter.

"So that's your Bolshevik, Jocelyn! What an amazing savage! How can you find anything in common with him?"

"He's a very decent chap," said Jocelyn, "and full of knowledge. Besides, I'm rather sorry for him. *Noblesse oblige*, and all that."

"What a kind heart you have, dear Jocelyn!" exclaimed

Lettice, with a little mockery and yet, I think, with a touch of sincerity.

But I could not listen to any more of her flippancy as I had promised to meet some friends at the Clarendon, and leaving Elizabeth to the young people I walked to keep my appointment. As it happened, I overtook the Ruskin College man in High Street and hardly liked to pass him without a word, especially after his *mauvais quart d'heure*.

"How did you like that pretty lady?" I asked, by way of conversation.

For a moment the fellow was silent; then he answered rather shyly, with a curious hint of bitterness or irony.

"I've no right to like her, sir! She's not my class; and she let me know it all right."

"Oh!" I said hastily. "I don't think that. I'm sure she didn't mean to be unkind."

"She's a lucky young woman," said the man thoughtfully.

"Why lucky?" I asked, wondering what thought was running through his head.

"Well," he said, "I've read a bit of history, and as far as I can make out it's taken six centuries of social privilege and the toil of labouring folk to create Miss Lettice Wingfield!"

"Isn't it worth it?" I asked, smiling at him, and treating his argument lightly. "Don't you like beauty?"

"Yes," he said, in his deliberate, thoughtful way. "It's wonderful to see. I felt ashamed when I took her little white hand in my big fist. Then I thought of the mill girls up North. They're not so fine and dainty, after working in the factories and living in the slums."

"You're bitter," I remarked, "and hardly fair. Some of those factory girls are darned pretty."

"Why, yes," he answered mildly, "that's true enough," and he seemed pleased with my remark.

"Don't think I'm hurt, sir, because she laughed at me. I'm a rough fellow beside a dainty thing like that. I'm only thinking of the social injustice which gives a girl of that class so much for nothing. My mother still scrubs the kitchen floor and her hands are rough to the touch. She married a miner at eighteen years of age, and has been leading a hard life since.

Miss Lettice Wingfield has never scrubbed a floor, I guess!"

"No," I said; "but girls like her, as dainty as she, went down on their knees and scrubbed out hospital wards in time of war, and did all kinds of dirty work for the men who fought."

"Ah!" he said darkly, "but not in time of peace. Anything in war time, when the fever's on, and when it's over, the men who saved their country are called 'dirty Bolshies' because they want decent wages for decent work—after all the promises made and never kept. . . . Good evening, sir."

He touched his hat to me and slouched down Walton Street, on the way to Ruskin College.

I confess this conversation left me with a sense of uneasiness. I didn't like that bitterness underlying the man's words, nor the class consciousness that seemed to me like injured vanity because that niece of mine had laughed at him a little. In Russia I had seen a revolutionary hatred of the much-maligned bourgeoisie, because they had better manners and better looks and better luck than the peasants and factory hands. If such a spirit were creeping into England, there was some excuse for reactionaries like Elizabeth's Bishop and my brother-in-law, who conjured up the bogey of Bolshevism which I refused to take seriously because it seemed to me utterly un-English. I resolved to warn young Jocelyn not to be too friendly with a man like that.

At dinner that evening I sat next to my nephew Mervyn and alluded to the subject.

"Isn't Jocelyn getting too friendly with that Ruskin College man? He seems to me a most unpleasant type."

Mervyn was amused by my anxiety.

"Jocelyn is rather keen on him. It's his reaction against parental narrowness and ecclesiasticism. His father is always ranting against Bolshevism and thinks the Labour Party is in league with Moscow. Personally I'm not interested either way. Politics bore me to death."

"You're rather a bored young man, aren't you?" I asked ironically.

"In spasms," he admitted with a youthful cynicism which I didn't like. "The atmosphere of Oxford tires me a little. So

very young! I feel more at home on the dancing floor at Prince's. I find that jazz has an exhilarating effect on my rather morbid temperament. I'm thinking of taking it up professionally. The life of a lounge lizard—what could be more pleasant or more profitable?"

He was trying to shock me, of course, and I refused to become the victim of his humour. But I answered him in his own vein.

"Yes, it would suit your type of manhood. So much more amusing than devoting one's life to the service of one's country, like your father over there."

Mervyn glanced towards his father at the head of the table.

"Poor old governor! The worst War Minister in history, I'm told, and certainly the worst public speaker it has been my misfortune to hear. After years of devotion to his country this little land of ours doesn't seem much better for his efforts. Perhaps a little worse! Miss Pomeroy regards him as one of the old men who let down the world. She told him so this afternoon, and he's rather peeved about it."

Elizabeth saw us smiling at her and raised her eyebrows in a comical way.

"No scandal about Queen Elizabeth!" she called across the table.

My sister Helen was watching Jocelyn and Lettice, who had made long-eared rabbits out of their table napkins and were putting up a fight with them.

She laughed at them with a smiling tenderness in her eyes for that pretty daughter of hers and this boy Jocelyn. If they had danced on the dinner-table she would only have rebuked them mildly with amused tolerance. She had no authority over that audacious niece of mine, and Mervyn treated his mother as a younger sister, without respect but with a humorous affection. She was typical of the mothers of post-war youth, wistful for their comradeship, not claiming and not expecting obedience—never getting it—and yet somehow, I imagined, having an influence and keeping a spiritual hold over her household by love and example. Perhaps after all, I thought, this new relationship between parents and children would work out better than the old authority. Tolerance might get better results than

intolerance—liberty might be an advance over parental discipline and elderly oppression. And yet I was not sure. These young people were rather distressing sometimes. Young anarchy to the tune of jazz bands—was that the way to happiness and the higher life?

My brother-in-law, Southlands—Tony, as I called him—glanced round his table at these youngsters, and he too smiled at the long-eared rabbits and the squeals of Lettice.

“Aren’t we getting a little rowdy?” he asked, but no one paid attention to this remark. No one ever did. A few moments later our eyes met and I saw a kind of sadness in his. This simple, rather stupid man who had made a fortune out of shipping and a peerage out of Lloyd George was, as he had told me, stricken by the loss of that eldest son of his, the splendid Harry—who had fallen in the war and would have been heir to the title now coming to Mervyn who “cheeked” him, as he said, and talked cynically of life and duty. Just for that moment I saw regret and remembrance in his eyes. I too was thinking of pre-war youth as I had known it in this house when I was one of them.

“My dears,” he said, clearing his throat and holding up his wine glass, “here’s to the younger generation, and eternal remembrance of those who died to save us all.”

“God!” said Mervyn in a low voice, “the Governor is getting sentimental!”

Elizabeth Pomeroy seconded the toast.

“Here’s to the League of Youth! . . . We’re all waiting for you.”

“Let’s do a fox-trot,” said Mervyn. “It’s the gramophone that’s waiting in the billiard-room. If there’s anything I hate it’s all this guff about youth.”

X

THAT night, after a game of bridge with my sister Helen and Elizabeth and that brother-in-law of mine, lights were turned out and I went up to my room with the others. The young people had gone to bed, it seemed, an hour before. Helen kissed me good night and hoped I would sleep well. But as a matter of fact I didn't, and, after an hour's wakefulness, put on my dressing-gown and went down to the billiard-room to fetch a novel I had left there—one of Galsworthy's. As I opened the door I was aware of a glimmer of light in the room and I heard the musical voice of my niece Lettice.

"You're too young, Jocelyn," she said. "I like you most frightfully, of course, but you're only a baby boy, you know!"

"Rot!" said Jocelyn. "I'm leaving Oxford next term and I love you most damnably. Say you love me! Promise to wait for me."

"I'm two years older than you," said Lettice. "I'm frightfully much wiser than you. . . . And I'm not going to let you kiss me again. No, it isn't good!"

Then she saw me. She was sitting on the arm of a leather chair, in silk pyjamas, which made her look like a fair-haired boy, and she was smoking a cigarette in a long amber tube.

Jocelyn was in his dressing-gown, a green garment with a cord round his waist, and he bent over her to snatch a kiss.

"Sorry, my dears," I said. "I'm looking for a book I left down here."

I tried to keep the tremor out of my voice—the sudden panic that took hold of me at the sight of those two children love-making while all the household was in bed. That tolerance, that liberty I had been thinking about—good heavens! how dangerous it was, how terrifying!

"A book, uncle?" asked Lettice. There was not a quiver

in her voice, not a sign of dismay in her eyes. "What's the title of it?"

"It's Galsworthy," I said. "'The Forsyte Saga.'"

"Here!" cried Lettice. She danced across the room and fetched it from the window seat.

"A jolly good book!" she remarked brightly.

Young Jocelyn stood with his two thumbs tucked through the cord round his waist. He did not avoid my eyes when I glanced over at him, and there was a faint smile about his lips.

For a moment I was silent, wondering how I should deal with this situation as a representative of the older generation. Lettice read my thoughts instantly, and took the words out of my mouth, or rather, repudiated them before they were spoken.

"Don't bother!" she said. "We don't need any moral axioms, Nunky. It's quite all right."

"Perfectly all right!" said Jocelyn. "Lettice and I have been having a little chat, away from the crowd."

Their self-assurance, the innocence of their looks, their mockery of my anxiety, disarmed me for the moment.

"You had better come to bed, all the same," I remarked feebly. "It's getting a bit chilly down here, and late anyhow."

"Words of wisdom," said Lettice demurely.

She linked her arm through mine, and smiled back at Jocelyn.

"Come on, little one. Bedibyes!"

She looked charming and roguish in her pyjama suit, and my sense of outrage was weakened. Jocelyn left us at the first door on the upstairs landing with a civil "Good night," and I conducted Miss Lettice to her own room. She switched on the light and stood smiling for a moment in the doorway.

"How much did you overhear?" she asked.

"More than Jocelyn wants me to know," I answered.

Then I took her hand and put it to my lips.

"Look here," I said, "I don't want to revive the part of Mrs. Grundy or anything like that. I know things are different nowadays. But you're old enough to know the danger of playing with fire—and young men's hearts. Be careful, my dear, for God's sake. Life is full of tragedy and risk."

"Pooh!" she said, and held out her cheek for me to kiss,

and then laughed as though very much amused with herself and life, and shut her door with a cheerful "Good night!"

I lay awake wondering about this new liberty between young men and women—boys and girls. Wasn't it going much too far? Wasn't it taking chances beyond the necessary checks and barriers of human nature? It was all very well to say, as I had often said, that these young people of the post-war age faced life with frank eyes and a wisdom beyond their years and a splendid fearlessness. But Jocelyn loved Lettice "most damnably," and he had tried to kiss her, and asked her to wait for him.

That sort of thing wasn't good for an Oxford undergraduate, or any. . . . I decided to speak a word to Helen next day.

XI

HELEN was not enormously alarmed, it seemed, when I spoke that word to her about the scene in the library between Lettice and Jocelyn.

"There's nothing in it," she said. "These boys and girls have their own code. It seems extraordinary to us but somehow it seems to work out all right. Of course I'm worried to death sometimes, but I find it best to trust them."

"But, my dear Helen," I said, "they're not archangels or disembodied spirits! That boy Jocelyn for instance is passionately in love with Lettice. Surely you must insist on a certain amount of propriety. You know my tolerance, but there must be some limit to the liberty of youth."

"They don't admit any," said Helen, smiling a little. "It's no use insisting. They're so sure of themselves. When I speak to Lettice about these things, she's shocked because I have such ideas in my head. Really and honestly shocked."

"Well, it beats me!" I exclaimed. "Perhaps I'm behind the times. Perhaps we're developing a new type of humanity, with a new set of ideas."

"The war changed everything," said Helen with a sigh.

I mentioned another subject which was worrying me a little.

"That boy Jocelyn, I like him enormously, but I don't approve of his friendship with that Ruskin College man. The fellow seems to be a bad type, class-conscious, bitter, and up against society."

"Is that so?" asked Helen, in her placid way. "Elizabeth was rather taken with him. As a matter of fact she has asked me to invite him for the week-end, so that she can talk over her League of Youth with him. I rather agree with her that it's good for the boys to make friends with a young man like that. It broadens their minds and brings them into touch with other classes."

"Jocelyn's father—the Bishop—won't like it!" I remarked. "That young man is one of the Reds if I'm not much mistaken."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Helen. "Lettice thought him rather attractive. 'Jocelyn's savage' she calls him! She thinks his visit will be rather a joke."

As a matter of fact there was something more than a joke in Lettice's satirical interest in Jocelyn's peculiar friend. For him there was a secret torture in it, I honestly believe, as I observed during that week-end I stayed at Southlands. The girl's beauty bewitched him and her mockery hurt him. I saw how his eyes followed her with a kind of sullen wonder and resentment that such a lovely thing could be. And truly in that old Georgian mansion, with its panelled walls and polished floors, Mistress Lettice, the rogue, had an exquisite charm and belonged utterly to the spirit of the place.

I saw them together first in the rose garden below the terrace as they had come back from a game of tennis—at least Lettice and Jocelyn had tried to teach the Ruskin College young man how to hold a racket and get a ball over the net—and smiled at the contrast of those three figures. Jocelyn was in spotless flannels, open at the neck, debonair, deeply bronzed, a fine type of young manhood. Lettice was in the lightest of tennis clothes, her brown arms bare to the shoulder, her frock short to the knee, a blue ribbon tied round her head with its boyish hair. Modern to the last breath, she yet had something elf-like about her—the look of a wood nymph strayed from one of the glades in her father's park. By her side was David Swayne in a grey flannel shirt and grey trousers held up by black braces, and a pair of tennis shoes he had borrowed from Jocelyn. With his broad shoulders and the red hair visible on his arms with their tucked-up sleeves, and his square, serious face under a carrotty crop, he might have been one of the gardeners in that English park, walking round to get his lady's instructions about "bedding-out." His eyes had a troubled look, as though he felt how utterly out of place he was in this environment and company.

Mervyn and I were sitting on a stone seat in a shady corner behind some rhododendrons as Jocelyn dashed past to have a

cold plunge after his game. Lettice was left alone with the Ruskin College man and we overheard some words they spoke as they came under the rosegrown pergola below the terrace, where presently Lettice sat in a cane chair looking up at her strange companion. Mervyn winked at me, as much as to say, "That pretty sister of mine plays the game jolly well!"

"You must tell me about those Trade Unions of yours," she said. "I've always been brought up to believe that they are organised tyrannies which may lead to revolution and anarchy in little old England. Correct me if I'm wrong!"

"That's all a lie!" said David Swayne. "Caste prejudice and political hatred. I owe everything to my Union. I'm loyal to it, body and soul. If it weren't for the Trade Unions, the working folk of this country would still be toiling for fourteen hours a day in foul factories—on wages that kept them brutified."

He stared across the vista of flower gardens and smooth-mown lawns to the park beyond, where a herd of deer nibbled the short grass between clumps of beeches.

"It's impossible for you to understand," he said, with a kind of impatient exasperation.

"Am I too stupid?" she asked teasingly.

He answered gravely and simply,

"Not stupid. Only ignorant."

I heard the girl give a little cry of indignation, not without amusement. Never before in her life, I am sure, had any man spoken to her like this rough fellow.

"The realities of life don't come into a place like this," he said, as though explaining his meaning. "You're sheltered from them. You'd turn sick if I took you into the slums of our northern cities where the factory folk live their ugly lives."

"Take me!" she answered, as though giving him a challenge. "I'd like to see your own home. I don't think I'd be sick in it."

He seemed to be wondering how she'd look in his home—that mining cottage from which he had come.

"When I think of my little home," he said, after a pause, "I'm ashamed to be here—in this great house. It makes me feel a traitor to my own class. I'll be glad to go back, remembering Oxford, and this place, where lucky folk live, not

caring a curse for the poor damned masses of ill-paid labour."

"Now you're unjust again!" said Lettice. "Some of us care very much. The Conservatives—my crowd whom you hate so much—have done a lot of social legislation."

The Ruskin College man laughed bitterly.

"Yes, they're getting afraid of us! They give us a few sops now and then. The Trade Unions have shown their strength. One of these days Labour will rule England, not on sufferance as last time but in full power."

Lettice was utterly scornful of that idea.

"Poor old England! If that happened it would lose a lot of its charm, Mr. Swayne!"

"That's true," he replied gravely. "Charm costs too much in human suffering. Under Labour rule there'd be no room for places like this, or people like you, with their lovely sheltered lives and cultured insincerities."

I heard the scrape of gravel under Lettice Wingfield's cane chair, as though she had drawn away from him.

"Aren't you getting rather rude?" she asked, with a hint of anger in her voice.

There was a silence, as though he were thinking out this question.

"I'd be sorry if you thought so," he answered. "I was only telling you the straight truth. Isn't truth best?"

"I find you very amusing!" she cried, and she gave her little musical laugh, which was pleasant to hear, though not without an irony which would have hurt me if I had been David Swayne. I think it hurt him, for he answered sulkily:

"Yes, I daresay I seem a funny kind of chap! 'A fresk,' as your brother's friends would say. You like to ask me teasing questions, as if you were poking a bear in its cage, or making friends with a fierce dog."

Mervyn and I had listened to this conversation as we sat smoking cigarettes, concealed by the rose-covered archway under which these two people down there were talking. We had exchanged glances, and Mervyn looked vastly entertained, but now I beckoned to him, and we moved away and went indoors.

"Hardly fair to listen!" I said. He agreed and laughed quietly in his supercilious way.

"No, but Lettice is having a great innings with Jocelyn's barbarian. It ought to broaden him a bit. She got in one or two good jabs."

That evening there was a fairly big dinner-party, and I heard afterwards from Jocelyn that it had needed a lot of persuasion to get the Ruskin College man down to table.

"I'll probably insult some of your fellow-guests," he remarked gloomily. "And I'll use the wrong knives and forks and make the menservants—those damned flunkys!—laugh behind their hands. No, I'll stay up in my bedroom, Pomeroy, and write a letter home to my mother and sister who will think I'm forgetting my proper station in life by staying with grand people like these. I was a fool to come, anyway."

But I found him next to Elizabeth Pomeroy at dinner, in a black jacket, with a ready-made tie and some signs of struggle to make his hair lie down. Elizabeth was trying to draw him out again in her cheery way, but he answered in monosyllables and looked distressed and painfully self-conscious. I noticed that he watched very carefully to see how the other people behaved with the forks and things, and he only made one slip from the perfect book of good behaviour by helping himself to some salt with a knife which had already been used. The guests were mostly the usual people one finds in houses of this class—two or three army men, including a middle-aged General with a bronzed face and puffed eyes and white moustache, the neighbouring Vicar, a retired judge, some elderly maiden ladies with decided opinions and resonant voices, some girl friends of Mistress Lettice, mainly interested in hunting and racing, a young naval officer just home from the China station, and one or two old cronies of my brother-in-law, Southlands. The conversation was not intellectual. For some time the subject of hunting and steeplechasing absorbed the interest at my end of the table, where David Swayne sat as silent as though a foreign language were being talked around him. It was only towards the end of dinner that more serious topics were introduced. It was the young naval officer who was the cause of the trouble.

During a pause in the general chit-chat he looked across at my nephew Mervyn and asked a question.

"What's the state of things in England? I feel like Rip van Winkle after three years' absence. Seems to me the country is plunging down the slippery slope."

"In what way?" asked Mervyn. "It's been going to the dogs ever since the Saxon chronicles. Anything fresh?"

"All this labour unrest," said the naval officer. "Now they say there's going to be another coal strike. If I had my way I'd hang some of those Labour agitators."

"The whole lot!" said one of the elderly maiden ladies, with the severity of Queen Elizabeth signing a death warrant. "If we had a Government with the courage of a louse they'd destroy the Trade Unions and exile every agitator in this unfortunate country."

"I agree," said my brother-in-law, Southlands. "We must take a strong hand, or perish."

"What we want is spiritual leadership," said Elizabeth. "Wait till I get my League of Youth going!"

"Now then, Elizabeth!" said my brother-in-law chaffingly.

"As for those coal-miners," said the General, twisting his little white moustache—"I consider they're blackmailing the nation. They're a lot of lazy scamps—and cowards, too, judging from what happened in the war when they took refuge in their mines and earned preposterous wages while poor old Tommy was fighting and dying for something like a shilling a day."

I saw the Ruskin College man jerk his head up as though an invisible lash had struck him across the face. For a moment he stared round the table with a cold rage in his eyes, as though hating all these people. Then his steely eyes met those of Lettice. She was smiling at him, a little maliciously, I thought, and then, just as the General was about to give tongue again, she spoke across the table in her clear, musical voice.

"What do you think, Mr. Swayne? I'm sure all of us would like to hear your views on the subject—as an expert."

For a moment Swayne looked as though he hated this girl,

too, but then the hard look died out of his eyes, his rage disarmed by her beauty.

"During the war," he said, "the miners worked till the sweat ran down their bodies so that England might win. Most of the younger men were fetched back from the trenches because their labour was wanted. Two of my brothers stayed there for good, like the son of this house. As for cowardice, I believe there's as much courage in a coal mine as in the trenches."

"Hear, hear!" said Elizabeth Pomeroy. "I'm quite certain of it, only these people won't believe you. They're dreadful reactionaries at this table!"

"It's just about the same," said the Ruskin College man, speaking quietly but with an intensity of emotion that was almost painful. "Before I left the pit for Ruskin College six of us were trapped by firedamp. No chance of escape, it seemed, when the shaft was blown in. The rescue parties fought to get at us. Eleven men—volunteers—were stifled by fumes . . . And we six sat singing hymns and holding hands because we hadn't a light, and two boys among us were frightened of this death in the dark. . . . It's not a safe job, mining. It's not a coward's job."

His eyes wandered from Lettice and he looked round the company at that table, where most of them stared at him as though amazed by finding a strange animal in their midst—or some dangerous rebel who might suddenly produce a bomb and blow the house up.

"Bravo!" said Elizabeth. "Did you hear that, Tony?"

My brother-in-law coughed nervously, and whispered something to Lettice as though asking "Who *is* this young man?" Jocelyn looked highly amused but a little embarrassed, as though responsible for his friend's behaviour. Swayne spoke again sullenly.

"You people," he said, "living in houses like this, are the real cowards. You're afraid of the working classes, whose labour builds up your wealth. You're scared because now and then they ask for a bit more on their wages, or refuse to be beaten back to beast-like conditions. Well, you're right to feel nervous about it. One of these days we'll make you pay for your contempt, your selfishness, and all the lies you talk about

them. I'm a guest in this house, and on my best manners, so I won't insult you, as I'd like to do. But I won't sit and listen to you."

He swept out his hand with a gesture of disdain and rage, knocking over the two wine glasses at the side of his plate so that they broke at the stems. He was unaware of this destruction. His face was dead white, and his eyes were like burning coals as he grasped the back of his chair for a moment and then strode out of the room.

There was a dead silence among us, broken first by my niece's light laughter.

"A splendid savage!" she said. "How frightfully amusing."

"Rather ridiculous," said Mervyn. "Jocelyn shouldn't bring his Bolshies into polite society."

"It was Aunt Elizabeth who asked him," said Jocelyn. "I'm frightfully sorry he made a scene like that."

He looked at Lettice and laughed, but in a rather shamefaced way, as though he had introduced a bull into a china shop and was somewhat embarrassed with the result.

The young naval officer was astounded, and so spoke to Mervyn.

"Who on earth is it? A Labour agitator? What's the idea?"

"Did you ever hear such language?" asked one of the elderly ladies. "Outrageous, my dear."

"There's a great deal in what he says," remarked Elizabeth calmly. "Anyhow it's good to hear his point of view. I must get him to speak at my working-man's club."

"I can't think who invited him," said my brother-in-law, rather fretfully. "I was not consulted, I think."

"My fault, Tony!" said Elizabeth. "I persuaded Helen. I'm interested in that young man. I've designs upon him—for my League of Youth."

"League of humbug," said my brother-in-law, angrily. "League of young anarchists, and work-shy ruffians. That young man was most insulting to all of us. Some of the things he said were disgraceful—unpardonable."

"They amused me," said Lettice. "He thrilled me to my marrow bones. I see Red Revolution advancing by leaps and

bounds. I see myself going to the scaffold, smiling disdainfully at the angry mob. My little white throat is bared for the dreadful knife——”

She stood up with an air of disdainful martyrdom, like Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine.

“Oh, my dear!” cried one of the elderly ladies with a little scream. “You’re curdling my blood with such dreadful visions. And they might happen at any moment, I’m certain. That young man is typical of his class.”

Mervyn and Jocelyn, after a whispered consultation, left the table and went out of the room, and they told me afterwards that they went up to David Swayne’s bedroom and found him packing his bag. He was sulky, but also rather ashamed of having made such a scene downstairs.

“I oughtn’t to have come! This isn’t my world. I’m a slum-dweller, and your people are not my people. I’ll walk down to the station and take a train back to Oxford.”

Nothing would induce him to stay in a house where he felt like a fish out of water. Not even Lettice, who followed the boys upstairs, could persuade him to postpone his departure under promise of being very nice to him and keeping him away from generals and naval officers.

“We didn’t really want to hurt your feelings,” she said. “And you must admit that you weren’t very careful of ours!”

“I’ve made a fool of myself,” he answered, “and you’ve had your laugh of me. You and your people only asked me here because you find me amusing—patricians jibing at a captured Goth.”

“Most unfair!” said Jocelyn. “Class consciousness of the worst kind.”

The Ruskin College man turned on him.

“It’s the same with you, Pomeroy, though it pleased my vanity to come to your rooms. It was wonderful to chum up with a young gentleman of the upper classes! Sometimes I was fool enough to believe in your sincerity. But I could see your supercilious smile when I argued in my crude way. I could see you watching me like a scientist with some wriggling beetle under his glass. I was one of the mob, and you found me surprisingly interesting as a study of the underworld. . . .

I've had enough of your damned patronising friendship. I'm going back to honesty and good comradeship, in my own class."

Jocelyn was stung to silence by these words and it was Mervyn who answered, as Lettice told me.

"We'll send you back in a car. And I'm sorry you think so little of our friendly interest in you. If I may say so, I think you're suffering from an inferiority complex. I should cut it out, if I were you. It's rather cramping to your good qualities—I say nothing of your good manners."

"Hush!" said Lettice, putting her hand on her brother's arm. "*Noblesse oblige*, old boy!"

David Swayne started off in Mervyn's car, with a man to drive him. But he didn't get very far. He got as far as the lodge gates on the south side of the park, and perhaps a few yards beyond. There was a nasty turn here between some high rhododendrons, and it happened that one of Lettice's friends—a sporting young lady—was swinging into it with a powerful Daimler without sounding a warning horn. One of those careless young women who make the English countryside extremely perilous! The Ruskin College man happened to be on the side she struck at a speed of thirty miles. They carried him back to the house unconscious, and the doctor who was sent for found that his shoulder blade was broken.

XII

ELIZABETH, that dear emotional and unwise lady—wise only in her warm heart—kept me in touch with that situation at Southlands. I had to get back to town again, and became engrossed in literary work, so that I could not follow the adventures of those young people, who seemed to me typical of this strange inexplicable youth, after the war, with its overthrow of all conventions, its questioning of all traditions, its rebelliousness.

It seemed that the Ruskin College man had been pretty badly hurt. He could not be moved for six weeks, and during that time put rather a strain on the household by his queer temper, and his class consciousness, and his ironical way of speech. And yet towards the end of his stay, according to Elizabeth, when he lay out of doors all day in an invalid chair, some of his harsh fanaticism, his class hatred of people with inherited wealth and old traditions, passed from him. It was their kindness that broke down the narrow frontiers of his mind.

"Helen, of course, has been adorable to him," said Elizabeth. "And I will say that even your brother-in-law—poor old Tony!—has played up to the spirit of *noblesse oblige*, though he regards that poor fellow as a future leader of Red Terror. He makes formal enquires about his health and then goes away shaking his head as though he had just been talking to Lenin or Trotsky and was not quite sure whether the laws of hospitality should go quite as far as that."

"How about Lettice?" I asked. "Her mockery, her smiling contempt of the man?"

Elizabeth laughed and informed me that she was proud of that pretty niece of mine.

"Of course she has been teasing him all the time," she said, "and she calls him Bolshevik to his face. Sometimes he's so

exasperated that I think he could kill her. And I'm not sure that she doesn't deserve to be strangled for the frightful things she says to him. But then to make amends she insists on reading out to him bits from the *Daily Herald* while she smokes cigarettes through that ridiculous tube of hers; and gives him his medicine according to doctor's orders—some sort of dope to ease the pain—and watches him when he falls asleep. Oh, her heart's in the right place after all."

"A very pretty comedy!" I said.

Elizabeth laughed at the thought of it.

"I've come to like that young man exceedingly. He's perfectly sensible in his political ideas, apart from a little bitterness at first. And he's so shy and modest. He says it makes him ashamed to see Lettice waiting on him like that. A great hulking fellow like him. It's unnatural, he says."

"I believe you're going to make him one of your tame Socialists," I said, and chaffed her a little.

Other people had been kind, it seemed. Even the old General came to enquire after him, and he brought him some peaches, and a book to read—which he didn't read, said Elizabeth—on Strategy and Tactics. The elderly ladies—those old cats, as Elizabeth called them—whom the Ruskin College man had alarmed so much at dinner that night, were allowed by Lettice now and then to come and see the patient, and they were very polite and hoped he was making good progress, and made a few remarks about the weather, forgetful of his dreadful Socialism, until Lettice hustled them out of the garden. The young naval officer who had caused all the trouble at the dinner-table by raising political questions came and smoked a foul pipe now and then, and yarned away with a genial frankness which made Elizabeth fall in love with him, she said. He even talked politics in such an open-minded way that David (I noticed that Elizabeth called him that) did not take offence.

"Fellows like me talk through our hats now and then," he remarked. "But we want to be fair. We naval officers think a lot of the men on the lower deck. There must be discipline, of course, but fair play all the time. It's the English character, don't you think?"

Elizabeth repeated this conversation with comical mimicry and said: "Don't you think that was very sweet? If we could get that spirit into England all would be well."

What touched the Ruskin College man most, it seemed, was the way they treated his mother. Helen had wired for her, and Mervyn met her at the station with his car, and behaved to her as though she had been some duchess, though she was a poor, plain woman with a work-lined face and thin hands roughened by a life of toil. She came across the lawn in her shabby dress—so Elizabeth told me—with a black hat perched uncertainly on her thin grey hair, looking frightened of this grand house and its gardens where her son lay ill, that son whom she had nursed at her breast, said Elizabeth emotionally, in a smoke-grimed cottage at the pithead; for whom she had wept one morning when, as a boy of fourteen, he had first gone down in the cage to the world of darkness from which he came up black with the curse of coal. It was Lettice who held her by the hand and led her across the lawn.

"Oh, my poor boy!" cried Swayne's mother, with a little break in her voice, seeing him lying there so helpless.

"I'm all right, mother," he said, trying to raise himself in the long cane chair.

Tears came into his eyes, though he smiled at her. Perhaps he saw for the first time how wan and worn she was, how poorly dressed, how unbeautiful, beside Lettice in her silk frock, on this velvet lawn.

"Why did you leave Burpham for this great grand world?" she asked in a frightened whisper, when they left the mother and son together.

"They're kind to me," they heard him say as they slipped away.

Mervyn went to lead her in to lunch, and afterwards they sent her back with a lapful of roses, while a footman carried her umbrella and spread a rug over her knees in the big Rolls-Royce.

"He's going away to-morrow," said Elizabeth. "And I think that accident of his has done him a lot of good. It's made him see another side of life."

"Well, I hope it will tame him," I said doubtfully.

"It's only ignorance that divides the classes," said Elizabeth, with an optimism which I thought unjustified. And yet, as I must now admit, my prejudice against the young Labour man was dispelled a little by what I heard afterwards from Mervyn and Lettice when they next came to town and entertained me with some further details.

It seems that the night before he went David Swayne lay, with his eyes closed, on a sofa in the library. Presently he spoke to Mervyn, who was reading a book.

"I've done with class hatred," he said. "We must find some other way out. . . . You people are too damned decent."

"Glad you think so," said Mervyn, startled by this compliment to his family and set.

David Swayne remained silent for a time, puffing at an old pipe, said Mervyn. Presently he spoke again.

"I'm learning tolerance. Class warfare is no damned good."

"Fine," said Mervyn, vastly amused. "Let's have good will on both sides, and to hell with Mr. Lenin."

David Swayne seemed amused by that, and his next remark was "priceless" according to Mervyn.

"I'll feel lost without fanaticism. Passion is a grand tonic!"

Before he left next morning he and Lettice walked into the garden while Mervyn was getting the car, and presently—as afterwards she told me with a laughing mockery—he turned and spoke emotionally.

"It's been a dream," he said—this garden and you. I'll never forget it—all your kindness to a working man, and the talks we've had—and your beauty."

She laughed and blushed at the remembrance of this homage to her beauty, and thought it very nice of him.

"I've learnt a lot from you," she said—"sincerely," as she asked me to believe!

He seemed pleased with that, and was silent for a while, staring down at the grass.

Then he told her that he was going to be a Trade Union official. He had had a wire from his Union, and they were pleased with the work he had done at Oxford.

"So I'll never go down the mine again," he said, "except to

see old pals. Well, I can't say I don't rejoice. But there's one thing I want to say if you'd have the patience to hear it."

"I want to hear it," she said.

"I want to say this," he answered in his slow, deliberate way: "I'll be on the other side of politics to you and your family. And I'm going to fight for my own side, hot and strong."

"Of course!" said Lettice, who told me that she was not at all abashed by this dark threat. "I believe in playing up for one's side. That's cricket."

David Swayne, she says, looked at her sombrely, wondering whether she was mocking him again.

"I'm a Trade Union man, body and soul," he affirmed, as though proclaiming his unalterable faith. "I belong to the people, and I've no use for this sort of thing."

His moody eyes gave one last look at the garden which a moment ago he had called a dream—with its terraced walks and flower-beds and a statue of Pan playing his pipes close to where they stood.

"That's all right," said Lettice soothingly. "But I knew all that before, you know. You're not surprising me!"

But he surprised her when he spoke his next words.

"Maybe not. But I'm going to make a promise to you, because of what you've done for me."

"A promise?"

She was puzzled, she told me, and looked at him in a quizzing way.

"It's a promise to myself really," he said. "A resolution for the future when I may have a bit of power. It's just this—politics are a dirty game, they say, but it's going to be a fair game, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm going to play for England as well as my own class."

"Good for you!" cried Lettice.

"For peace and good will," he said gravely, "and to hell with class hatred and civil war."

"More power to you," answered Lettice, amused, and yet touched by this simplicity. He spoke as though certain that one day power would be his, for good or evil.

"And if you want to know why I say these things," he

added, looking at her in a "funny" way, she said, "it's because you've taught me charity and taken the hate out of my soul."

"I'm glad," said Lettice, and she felt ashamed, she told me, of having laughed at him so much with such contemptuous amusement for his rough ways and fanatical ideas. As he stood before her there she was aware, she said, of a quality in him which rebuked her flippancy.

She held out her hand to him, and he actually raised it to his lips and kissed it before he said good-bye.

"So, you see, I've tamed Jocelyn's savage!" said Lettice, with a ripple of laughter, and a sudden blush which made her look bewitching. "Good work for England, uncle! One of our future Labour leaders ready to eat out of my hand."

"Yes, pretty useful work!" said Mervyn, regarding his sister with a hint of admiration. "It will do something to redeem your life of sin, old girl."

I wasn't at all sure, and ventured to express my doubts.

"All you've done, my dear," I said, "is to add another scalp to your waistband. It's quite obvious that our Labour young man is darkly and passionately in love with you. I call that cruelty."

"I call it Christian charity," said Lettice. "Besides that's ridiculous anyhow. . . . He knows I'm—different."

"How about Jocelyn all this time?" I asked. "Isn't he jealous of his Labour friend?"

Mervyn and Lettice exchanged glances and then laughed rather mysteriously.

It appeared that Jocelyn had been sent down from Oxford for breaking college rules persistently and flagrantly. On the last occasion it was Lettice who had led to his downfall, by allowing him to take her to a certain dancing-hall, strictly prohibited to undergraduates. They had gone in disguise as Anthony and Cleopatra, but Jocelyn had been spotted and hauled out by an officious person, calling himself a proctor, who took the matter seriously when Jocelyn knocked out one of his "bull-dogs."

"I'm frightfully sorry for Jocelyn," said Lettice. "Of course it was all my fault. I've written to tell his father so."

"From what I know of his father," I said, "it won't soften parental wrath. That Bishop is a man of austere morality."

"A domestic tyrant," said Lettice. "I must say that it's very weak of Jocelyn not to have dealt with him firmly."

"Yes," said Mervyn. "Our parents have been properly tamed. Lettice broke their spirit years ago. 'Down with discipline!' was her nursery slogan. Besides, the mater is all for tolerance, God be praised. . . . By the way, uncle, Lettice and I will be rather late to-night. A rather giddy show with the Glad Young Things. I suppose we can sleep on your door-mats?"

It meant that I gave up my bed to Mervyn, while Lettice slept in my dressing-room, and I took to the sofa. It was four o'clock when they woke me up over a book I had finished three hours before, and they made no apologies.

Lettice looked as fresh as a rose at dawn.

XIII

I HAD an opportunity of seeing something more of young Jocelyn, who had fallen in love with my attractive niece—at a time of life when he ought to have been concentrated on his studies—when I went up to Burpham in the Black Country to stay a week-end with his father the Bishop, who was Elizabeth's brother. That was not my purpose in going. I was at that time almost foolishly worried about social conditions in England, and Elizabeth Pomeroy kept touching a soft spot in my conscience, and perhaps played a little on my egotism, when she urged me to give up writing novels—fiction for flappers, she was pleased to call them—and do some honest work for my country by revealing the perils that confronted us and appealing to the spirit of service and sacrifice in all classes to repay our debt to the dead and give a better chance of happiness to the living. It was a fixed conviction of hers—and I secretly agreed—that the politicians in power were hiding the horrid truth of things from the people, pretending that all was well when trade was languishing, and when bitterness was creeping into mean streets because of foul conditions of housing, workless populations, and class hatred. She looked at the problem entirely from the individual and emotional point of view, as she saw it in her free lodging-house and her working-man's club, where, of course, she came in personal touch with many hard-luck cases and with that sediment of misery and despair which is always to be found in great industrial cities, especially in time of trade depression. I could not deny her main argument that the nation was not facing up to facts, though I profoundly disagreed with her socialistic views and indiscriminate charity.

"All you want to do," I said, "is to create a nation of paupers, comfortably supported by a benevolent State—until it goes bankrupt."

"All I want to do," she said, "is to get a move on to these optimistic idiots—our senile statesmen—who talk glibly of trade booms when there's a tidal wave of unemployment creeping up and up until we're nearly drowned in it. They fail to see that there's going to be a revolution unless they reorganise our social system."

"I can't see the slightest sign of revolution," I said.

"Then you wear rose-tinted glasses," she retorted. "Down in Walworth there's a lot of sinister propaganda about. Little leaflets handed to the factory workers—they bring them sometimes to the club. And, at night, after working hours, there are street-corner orators, mostly Russian Jews, who talk revolution openly to young men and women, who aren't exactly satisfied with their conditions of life. How can they be, with whole families in one room and no work for decent men who helped to save their country in time of war?"

"It doesn't bear out what Frank Hardy told me," I reminded her. "Do you remember? He said that he marvelled at the patience of the crowd."

"That's true," said Elizabeth. Then she thought for a moment, and added darkly, "Patience can be overstrained. I hear things . . . my men confide to me. . . . I'm getting scared."

She failed to scare me, and I jibed at her again.

"Aren't you playing into the hands of these people? Some of your parlour Socialists—those short-haired women and long-haired men—are just pandering to discontent with their unpractical theories of social revolution. If it happens, they'll be the first to have their throats cut."

"Poor dears!" said Elizabeth. "They want to make a better job of life. You must admit there's lots of need. You're not such a reactionary as you pretend to be. At heart you're on our side, and we claim you as one of us."

I refused to identify myself with any side.

"I've no political convictions. I'm just a looker-on, trying to get at the truth of things with an open mind."

It was to get at the truth of things that I went up to Burpham in the Black Country, to see her brother at the time of that coal crisis, which ended in a Government subsidy to maintain

the scale of wages—buying off the Danes!—while a Royal Commission was appointed to report on the state of the industry.

I had another motive for going up there. It was to have a look at Frank Hardy—that young friend of mine whom I had found in Elizabeth's lodging-house. He was still assistant librarian in her brother's palace, but from one or two letters he had sent me lately it seemed that he was anxious, for some reason, to change his job.

One or two phrases in those letters had worried me a little.

"The Bishop is a domestic tyrant," he wrote. "We all live in fear of him. If it weren't for Nancy I couldn't stand it a week longer. Perhaps for that reason I ought to leave at once. There are times—don't you think?—when it's best to cut and run. If you hear of anything going in London, I should be enormously grateful."

I read out those words to Elizabeth.

"What do you make of that?"

She seemed to make it out rather rapidly.

"That nice friend of yours has fallen in love with Nancy—excellent! I'm all for romance, and Nancy is a sweet thing."

"I agree," I said. "But, unfortunately, Hardy is dependent on your brother for a job. He couldn't take Nancy to your lodging-house in Walworth."

Elizabeth laughed, and seemed to find a little humour in the situation.

"Not for more than a night or two, poor darlings—and then they'd be separated. Well, you'd better go and see about it."

Before I went, she gave me a small parcel to take up to Nancy. It was the girl's birthday, and she was sending her an evening frock which would be useful when she came up to town again.

"The poor child is hopelessly behind the fashion," said Elizabeth. "It's a shame!"

"Is there a lady's frock in this parcel?" I asked, weighing it in my hand. "I should have thought it was a pocket-handkerchief."

"Modern frocks don't take up much room," said Elizabeth. "And, by the by, if you're going up to-morrow, you'll meet Jocelyn on the train. He's been sent down from Oxford, poor boy. You heard of that episode with your naughty niece?"

"Yes," I answered, "and I'm very angry with the minx."

Elizabeth smiled at my anger.

"These young things twist you round their little fingers. Well, give my love to Jocelyn and tell him that there's always a spare bedroom in his auntie's house, if he wants to flee from parental wrath."

"Elizabeth," I said solemnly, "you and I are traitors to our age and faith. Those nephews and nieces of ours are exploiting our good nature. We're far too tolerant."

"Wait till you see intolerance!" said Elizabeth. "That brother of mine rules his household with a rod of iron."

XIV

ELIZABETH'S nephew, young Jocelyn Pomeroy, had already established himself in a third-class carriage at Euston when I arrived at the station for that journey up north, as I could see by his golf-clubs and numerous magazines.

Before the train started he stood in conversation with that Ruskin College man, David Swayne, who had made such a scene at Southlands before his accident.

I overheard a remark he made while Jocelyn was lighting his pipe, before he became aware of my presence.

"Can't you persuade your father to see the miners' point of view? That letter to the *Times* was a damned outrage."

Jocelyn grinned, and puffed out his burning match.

"You don't know my honoured father, old man!"

"I've heard him preach," said David Swayne, with dark irony. "It made me see red."

"Your favourite colour, I think?" remarked Jocelyn.

"Well, I'll be seeing you in Burpham before long," said his shabby friend, ignoring this jibe. "Then you'll cut me dead in the street."

"Class consciousness again!" said Jocelyn.

The train started, and Jocelyn hopped in, and was greatly surprised when I said, "Hullo, my lad!"

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

I broke the news to him that I was going to spend a week-end with his father and mother, and he looked amused and not displeased, though his next remark was not encouraging.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," he said, with an air of friendly candour.

"How's that?" I asked.

He allowed himself a faint smile.

"The atmosphere is going to be rather chilly, I'm afraid. I've been sent down from Oxford."

"Yes," I said, "that abominable niece of mine has been leading you astray."

He blushed vividly, but was gallant in denial.

"Not her fault in the least! . . . A harmless little rag, displeasing to old gentlemen without a sense of humour. My father, I regret to say, is one of them. Well, I've done with Oxford."

"What next?" I asked.

He looked thoughtful for a moment, and then laughed.

"I'll have to earn my living somehow, I suppose. I'm rather good on the saxophone."

"Too many competitors," I suggested, and he agreed.

"Yes. . . . My father wanted me to go into the Church. Well, I'll see myself damned first."

"It may be the alternative," I remarked grimly, and he laughed without taking umbrage.

"I expect I'll become a candidate for Aunt Elizabeth's night refuge. . . . Unless I join David Swayne on the *Workers' Weekly*. He thinks I could get the job of sub-editor. It sounds attractive. His father runs the show. On Trade Union funds."

"What about *your* father?" I asked, not taking him seriously, but playing up to his pose of the moment. "He'd rather see you dead than join that crowd."

He admitted that it might lead to a little unpleasantness and strained relations.

"And that niece of mine?" I suggested slyly. "She's rather prejudiced against the Labour point of view."

Jocelyn blushed again and avoided my smiling glance.

"She rather took a fancy to that fellow Swayne," he said, and I detected a faint hint of jealousy, which seemed to me absurd when I remembered how Lettice had mocked at that shabby young democrat."

We took lunch together in the restaurant car and I tried to get at his ideas about life and politics, but he was rather guarded in his replies until he warmed up a little over a bottle of cheap wine.

"The fact is," he confessed, "fellows of my age can't see much of a prospect ahead. This snob education of ours doesn't

seem to lead anywhere. What am I fitted for, taking myself as a painful example? It's true I rotted about rather at Oxford, but, anyhow, supposing I had pulled off a degree, what use would that be? It doesn't seem to help in trade or politics. It wouldn't provide me with an income of any kind. Of course, I might have been a master in a public school, teaching little boys how to play cricket and cultivating their snob ideas. But that doesn't appeal to me very much. At the end of twenty years I might have got a headmastership, and a wife tired of waiting for me so long."

I was tempted to tell him that Lettice wouldn't wait nearly as long, but I refrained from this cruelty.

"The fact is," he said, "this social system of ours is all wrong. We're anachronisms—I mean fellows like me, with a classical education—not that I'm any good at that!—and expensive tastes and a rather good handicap at golf. Far better if I had been taught a trade, or business ideas. Don't you agree, sir?"

We argued the matter out, and I could see that the boy was bitter and perplexed, and perhaps a little rebellious against inevitable limitations of life at his age. That love-affair with Lettice was in the background of his mind. Nature demanded that he should find his mate. Hard economic facts, as the leader-writers would put it, made marriage out of the question for years to come, perhaps. And the aftermath of war, the breakdown of old privileges of caste and education, the upward surge of new classes taking places which formerly had been reserved for the sons of Bishops and their kind, left a boy like that without any definite or obvious future.

"How about the Bar?" I asked.

"Vastly overcrowded!" he answered. "Everybody says so."

"Always room for the man on top," I told him.

He thought the pressure was rather painful at the bottom of the scrum.

He got up to the subject of politics and rather amused me by his admiration for the Labour Party, which he thought had all the argument on their side. Some of his remarks suggested that he had been more influenced than he cared to admit by his friendship with the Ruskin College man.

"Labour," he assured me, "is constitutional. It believes in

evolution, not revolution. All that stuff about Bolshevism, which shocks my father so much, is put up by the *Morning Post* to frighten old ladies and the clergy, and win votes for reactionaries and profiteers."

"I'm not sure," I said. "Labour may be beaten by their Left Wing—under the orders of Moscow."

He smiled in a superior way at that fear of mine, which seemed to him ridiculous.

He happened to know the feelings of the working men, he told me—the miners, anyhow. They were the most decent set of men in the world.

"I go among them up in Burpham," he said, by way of explanation of his dogmatic assertions. "I know them in their homes. Besides, that fellow Swayne is typical of the way they're thinking. They think a dashed sight harder than the average undergraduate."

I was interested in this boy not only because he was Elizabeth's nephew and a lover of Lettice—the pretty hussy—but because of his ideas. If young Oxford were thinking like that there might be some reason for Elizabeth Pomeroy's League of Youth, based on a closer understanding between the classes, and less snobbishness on both sides, and a more liberal spirit.

"Not that I have any serious convictions," he said presently, echoing my own remark to Elizabeth. "Don't run away with the idea that I'm an earnest young man out to save humanity or anything like that!"

He had taken refuge in flippancy again.

Before we reached our journey's end conversation languished, and the boy buried himself in his magazines. But while he was collecting his bags and golf-clubs, as the train slowed down, he gave me another warning, as though preparing me for an uncomfortable week-end.

"You're going to have a pretty thin time, sir, I'm afraid! Gloom pervades my father's rotten old palace, and he keeps us all in a state of suppression. The only bright spot is my sister Nancy. She and I are great pals."

Certainly my first impression of Burpham and the Bishop's palace was gloomy in the extreme, though it was not without grandeur and a kind of romantic grimness. It was nearly dark

when we arrived, and the cathedral and adjoining palace on high ground above the city looked like a mediæval fortress, black against the setting sun, which glowed crimson below a bank of wind-driven clouds. There were battlemented walls up there, and I remembered that the Bishops of Burpham in the old days had been princes as well as priests, holding their sway even in defiance of English kings, who tried to abate their power and ruling in their own courts, with absolute right of life and death.

As though guessing my thoughts, young Pomeroy glanced up at the walls on the hill up there and uttered a sarcastic comment.

“One of the last strongholds of intolerance!”

There was a one-horsed carriage waiting for us with a coachman in black livery and a cockade, who looked as though he might be a Bishop himself, until he touched his hat respectfully to Jocelyn, who greeted him good-humouredly.

“Hullo, Bolton! How are things going? Merry and bright as usual in this gay little city?”

“Not over bright, Mr. Jocelyn,” said the coachman with a cautious smile. “His lordship takes a black view of the situation, I believe.”

“He would,” said Jocelyn. “Well, get a move on this ancient hearse.”

Inside the carriage he confided to me that his father did not approve of modern methods of transport. He regarded motor-cars as one of the chief causes of contemporary restlessness and demoralisation.

“Don’t tell him that I run a little two-seater at Oxford, sir! Not yet fully paid off, I regret to say.”

We drove away from the station through the main streets of Burpham, and I had my first view of the mining city. It was unattractive, and there was a meanness and squalor about it which were not dispelled by the glare of electric light in the shop windows. The houses were blackened by the curse of coal, which has blighted so much of England’s beauty. Here there never had been beauty, since these houses were built at the cheapest possible cost, in the plainest and most horrible uniformity, for the population which worked below ground,

and for women producing babies who in due time would become wage slaves to the black demon which drives the wheels of the world. The streets were crowded with men lounging about with their hands in their pockets, staring into the shop windows, smoking cigarettes in groups around the lamp-posts. Women and girls with shawls over their heads were doing their marketing or gossiping with the men. Outside a picture palace there was a long queue waiting for the early show, shuffling their feet on the damp pavement. A rather mournful-looking crowd, I thought, without a sense of gaiety in life. They might have been waiting for a funeral instead of a "Thrilling Drama of Romance and Passion," as I saw advertised in flaming letters above their heads.

"The open door to hell!" said Jocelyn, ironically, as we passed this crowd. "That's what my honoured father thinks of the movies, as no doubt he'll tell you. He preached a sermon about it last time I was home. It didn't increase his popularity with working folk, who find the pictures the best way of escape from their own squalor of life."

After toiling up hill our carriage passed through an ancient gateway in the high battlemented walls, rattled over a flagged courtyard, entered another gate and skirted a smooth lawn. Beyond that green carpet the cathedral rose with magnificent effect of flying buttresses and pointed windows to the high-pitched roof with many pinnacles and crockets and grotesque gargoyles etched sharply against the evening sky, still flushed with the afterglow of sunset. Lights gleamed flower-like through the chancel windows, and I heard solemn organ music as we passed by the east window.

"Evening service," said young Pomeroy, and he groaned in a comical way with an "Oh Lord!" as though he had a grudge against it.

Presently our carriage went through another archway, across another courtyard, and stopped outside a long, low, rambling building with oriel windows and Tudor doorways and old grey walls clad with creeper, wine red in this early autumn.

"Here we are," said young Pomeroy. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

XV

IT was rather dark inside the panelled hall, immensely spacious under a timbered roof and leading to a broad stairway of richly-carved oak which glimmered under wrought-iron lanterns between tattered tapestries. Along the walls were some uncomfortable-looking chairs with leather backs, and I noticed that there was no carpet anywhere, and that one's footsteps clumped on the bare boards and echoed above one's head.

"Cheery and homelike, isn't it?" remarked Jocelyn in his ironical way.

A footman brought in our bags, and that parcel I had brought up for Nancy. He asked if I would go straight to my room, but before I followed him I saw Nancy come down the big stairway—not demurely, but with a flying rush.

"Jocelyn!" she cried, and flung her arms around his neck.

He kissed her and disengaged himself in a brotherly way.

"Hullo, Nancy, old girl! So your spirit isn't crushed yet, in spite of parental tyranny and ecclesiastical intolerance? Marvellous!"

"Hush!" said Nancy, glancing towards the footman, who went upstairs with the bags.

"Father is extremely angry with you, Jocelyn, for being sent down like that. How did it happen?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Intolerance again. Old age is taking itself seriously. Where's the mater?"

"At evensong," said the girl. "I slipped away to be here when you came. Only don't tell father or he will think I'm losing faith."

Jocelyn laughed and looked at her with brotherly amusement.

"You're too old to be sent to bed without supper these days. Has father found a new method of punishment for rebellious souls?"

"Only the sword of speech," said Nancy. "But he's given us up as hopeless. He thinks you've disgraced yourself for life, and he regards me as a Sign of the Times!"

She had failed to notice me standing there in the great dusky hall, but Jocelyn whispered something, and she turned suddenly and came to me with outstretched hand.

"I'm so sorry! . . . And so glad you've come. Jocelyn's arrival made me forget everything."

"Including your manners," said Jocelyn, with brotherly impudence.

"I bring greetings and gifts," I said. "From your Aunt Elizabeth." And I presented the little parcel which I had kept apart from my bags.

"Isn't she the dearest woman in the world!" cried Nancy. "Now I wonder what this contains!"

"The latest thing in frocks," I said, and she laughed and cried "Good Gracious!" and then glanced comically at her own shabby dress and confessed that it was time she had something new.

It was Jocelyn who took me to my room, up the big stairway and along a narrow corridor, with bare stone walls like a monastery, where there was a lurking smell of dampness or ancient ghosts. The bedroom was a chill-looking chamber, plainly furnished, and dimly lit up by one gas-bracket. By my bedside I found Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Holy Dying," and a small volume by the Bishop of Burgham called "Duty and Discipline."

"Rather like a prison cell," said Jocelyn, "but I hope it won't get on your nerves."

"There's nothing wrong with it," I told him, and he smiled incredulously and left me to myself.

While I was dressing for dinner, I heard a tap at the door, and when I called "Enter!" Frank Hardy appeared, and came into my room in an apologetic way.

"I'm frightfully sorry! I couldn't get away before. I hope you had a good journey and all that?"

"Excellent!" I said, and gripped his hand. "How are things going, Frank?"

From his appearance things were going rather well. He had lost the haggard look which I had seen in his face when I found him in Elizabeth Pomeroy's lodging-house. He looked younger, healthier, with a brighter look in his eyes. And yet his answer, I thought, was rather enigmatical.

"It's rather difficult. . . . I don't think his lordship approved of me. . . . Still, I've had a very interesting time, thanks to you."

"Rather dull, I'm afraid," I said, smiling at his lack of enthusiasm. "Still, I daresay Miss Nancy brightens up life a little."

He avoided my searching gaze, and his face flushed quickly.

"We get on rather well," he said, "but of course I'm old enough to be her father. Sometimes I seem a thousand years old."

"That's an oldish feeling at twenty-eight!" I told him.

"When I think of the war and all that——" he said.

He changed the subject rather hurriedly and said that Nancy's mother, Lady Louisa, was extraordinarily kind.

"Mothers me in a most wonderful way, poor soul!"

"Why 'poor soul'?" I asked curiously.

He gave a sigh and thrust his fingers through his hair.

"Well, the Bishop is rather severe at times! We're all afraid of him. To tell you the honest truth, there's only one person in this household who isn't scared stiff of him, and that's Nancy, who has the most amazing pluck. . . . Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll rush off and dress. Mustn't keep dinner waiting, you know! It's one of the unpardonable crimes—and there are lots of others."

It was half an hour later when a servant tapped at my door, with the rather formidable announcement that his lordship awaited me in the library; and I confess to some moments of nervousness as I descended for that meeting and advanced towards the Bishop across an immensely long room, furnished from floor to ceiling with old folios and ancient books. He stood with his back to a big fireplace, which was elaborately carved with the arms of the Bishopric of Burham, and I had time

to get a quick impression of this tall, thin figure in absolute black, with its apron and gaiters. His aristocratic face was in character with this old place. It would have been a good model for a portrait of Stephen Langton, or Thomas à Beckett, or one of those mediæval clerics who defended the Church against kings jealous of its power. It was a handsome face, carved with hard lines, ascetic, stern, strong.

On one side of the room, at some distance from him, a clergyman of florid complexion and middle age stood nervously, as though ready for instant obedience to any command. On the other side of the room was Frank Hardy, who had hurried into his dinner clothes and preceded me. As I came in he smiled with secret amusement.

Then I found myself shaking hands with the Bishop, or rather, holding a long, thin hand which rested in mine for a moment and then withdrew. His voice broke the silence of this book-lined room rather harshly, though his words were courteous.

"I am glad to see you here. My wife and daughter admire your books, though, personally, I have no time for reading light literature, and, if you'll pardon my frankness, little inclination."

I smiled and murmured something civil.

"I understand you want to study the conditions of this district for a series of articles in the Press," he said, and waited for my word of agreement. For a moment I saw a smile of irony steal into his cold grey eyes.

"The Press does not seem to me very passionate for the truth! I see mostly nonsense in the newspapers, and a lot of weak and foolish words. However, I shall be glad to help you in any way I can. My secretaries will provide you with a good many facts."

He glanced for a moment at the florid-faced clergyman, who started and looked frightened, and then bowed in my direction."

"There is more in this situation than facts and figures," said the Bishop. "It's a question of character as well as of economics—spiritual values as well as wages and tonnage. If you want to know the truth about this deplorable crisis which is helping to ruin England, you will find it in the public-

houses, where demoralised men are swilling beer while they are living on the dole. You can see it round the platforms in the market-square, where political agitators, paid by foreign gold, talk treason with impunity and incite young fools to revolutionary violence. It's in the picture-palaces, where American-made films exhibit the indecent luxury of the idle rich and create desires and envies among the mining class which fill them with dissatisfaction of their old lot and hatred of people like ourselves. It's not slackness of world trade which is ruining this country, but slackness of moral fibre—Godlessness, laziness, a mental revolt against discipline and duty, a belief that there can be higher wages for less work, a mad desire for all the pleasures of life without sacrifice and toil."

While he spoke I heard a slight cough from young Hardy, and caught again his faint satirical smile.

"I want to investigate all that," I said guardedly, and then spoke a word about Frank Hardy, expressing my pleasure at finding him there.

"I'm afraid Mr. Hardy will never make a good librarian, said the Bishop, rather icily. "I notice that ex-officers have elementary ideas of order and method. But for Elizabeth's sake I am glad to find a place for him. Let us go in to dinner, gentlemen."

He preceded us, and I noticed the straightness of his back, the grave dignity of his heavy tread.

The clerical secretary followed him obsequiously, and Hardy and I lagged behind a little. It was when we walked down the long passage filled with arched windows looking out to a quadrangle, now filled with a dusky twilight, that Hardy found the chance of whispering a word or two.

"Army discipline was nothing to this," he said. "The old man would have made a wonderful General—as hard as nails."

I said "Hush!" afraid lest the Bishop might hear, or that middle-aged cleric, who looked back over his shoulder with a smiling glance which I did not quite trust.

The dining-room was like a miniature banquetting-hall, with panelled walls and a high timbered roof. An old oak table, immensely long, was laid for dinner, and the silver and glass shone on the polished board. Lady Louisa Pomeroy—the

daughter of an earl, who had fallen in love with Rupert Pomeroy when he was a curate at St. Peter's, Eaton Square—stood waiting for her husband by one of those great fireplaces with carved mantelpieces and wrought-iron "dogs" in which many trees must have been burnt through centuries of history. She was a tall, pale, rather beautiful woman, with sad eyes, I thought, in spite of the smile with which she greeted me as I advanced towards her. Her daughter Nancy was by her side, in a pretty evening frock of rose-coloured silk. Charming, I thought.

After greeting his wife with a word of excuse for keeping her waiting, the Bishop turned to his daughter, and said:

"Well, Nancy, have you seen Jocelyn yet?"

"Yes, father."

"Of course he's late for dinner as usual. After disgracing himself at Oxford, one might expect a little civility at home."

"He won't be a minute, father," said Nancy. "He couldn't find his dress tie."

The Bishop smiled sardonically, and then stared at his daughter with a kind of amazement.

"What's that you're wearing, child? God bless my soul!"

He fell back a step and stared at her up and down with increasing disapproval.

"It's my new frock, father. Aunt Elizabeth's birthday present—and the latest thing from London. Isn't it sweet?"

She faced him with laughing eyes, though the colour in her cheeks deepened.

"It's indecent," said the Bishop sternly. "It hardly covers your knees. And your arms are bare to the shoulders."

He hesitated for a moment and then spoke quietly, as though delivering a judgment.

"You must go upstairs and change it, Nancy. I cannot sit down to dinner with you in a thing like that. It's against my principles, as you well know."

"Nonsense, father!" said Nancy. "How can you be so absurd—and so unkind—with guests present!"

She spoke in a low voice which quivered, and I saw her eyes glisten with a hint of tears.

"I have spoken, Nancy," said her father, with a severity which was like a judgment of Fate.

"My dear!" said Lady Louisa, putting a timid hand on her husband's arm, "it is perfectly proper for a young girl like Nancy. I assure you it is *quite* respectable—and the very latest fashion."

"I do not tolerate the fashions of immorality," said the Bishop sternly. "How can I denounce the indecent dress of miners' girls if my own daughter is so—so outrageously immodest?"

For a moment there was a painful silence. Hardy had pretended not to have heard a word of this family argument, and began to talk rather loudly—some futile remarks about the weather—to cover up the episode. But I heard Nancy's challenge to her father:

"Very well, then, father! I shan't sit down to dinner with you. But I warn you that I'm getting too old to be treated like a child and insulted publicly. It's—unendurable!"

That last word was spoken with pent-up bitterness.

"Dinner is served, I think," said the Bishop, and the thin line of his lips hardened for a moment. I heard the swish of Nancy's frock—that rose-coloured garment which suited her so charmingly—as she disappeared from the room, and a long, deep-drawn sigh from Lady Louisa. Then the Bishop said grace, while I bent my head and felt sorry for Nancy.

It was after that when young Jocelyn came in, still fiddling with his dress tie and with a nervous glance at his father.

"Sorry for being late," he said, with a fairly good attempt at self-confidence.

"It's a bad beginning," said his father grimly. "I shall never teach you discipline, Jocelyn. I'm not surprised you've been sent down from Oxford. It was only to be expected."

"In that case," said Jocelyn coldly, "there's no need of further explanation."

He sat next to his mother, and put her hand to his lips. Presently he looked up sharply, as though missing something.

"Where's Nancy?" he asked.

Lady Louisa whispered to him, glancing timidly at her husband, and I saw the boy jerk his head up and look at his father

with an expression in which there was no filial affection.

The dinner was somewhat of an ordeal. I was conscious of a sense of suppression, almost a sense of fear, among these people at table with me, as though they were all hiding something and were afraid of being found out by that stern old man who sat at the head of the board. It was all so different from the free and easy behaviour at Southlands where my sister Helen smiled indulgently at any rowdiness and where my brother-in-law was utterly disregarded at his own table by Mervyn and Lettice and other young folk. I noticed that the eyes of Lady Louisa sometimes met those of the Bishop's secretary, that florid fellow to whom I had taken a dislike—I found out that his name was Caldicott—and then she avoided them quickly, as though there might be danger in this exchange of glances. Frank Hardy made a valiant attempt at cheerfulness, and told one or two amusing stories for the benefit of Jocelyn. They didn't go very well, as Jocelyn sat glum and silent, owing, no doubt, to the absence of his sister Nancy. Even Frank Hardy could not conceal a look of gloom when one of the black-liveried footmen carefully filled his glass with cold water, but he retained sufficient sense of humour to give me one of his characteristic smiles, as though to say, "An austere life in this household!"

It was the Bishop who did all the talking, and I must say in fairness to him that I was impressed by his grave, well-chosen words, his absolute sincerity, a kind of smouldering fire of passion in him for truth and honesty and righteousness. I could not but agree with him that since the over-strain of war in England there was an apparent weakening in the moral fibre of many people in all classes, and a most lamentable failure of leadership. He analysed the political situation, and asserted that every party shirked the real issues which confronted the nation, and hid the naked truth from the people—the truth that we had lost our old reserves of wealth, many of our markets, and that industrial supremacy which had once been ours, because we could supply the best coal at the cheapest rates to the factories of the world, and carry it from port to port in ships which brought back all the food we needed to support our population. Now, he said, the bottom had fallen

out of coal, our prices were far too high for the reduced purchasing power of foreign markets, and, anyhow, the same amount of coal was not wanted. In his opinion the mining population was too big for the conditions of the industry. Hundreds of thousands of men would have to seek other forms of labour, or perish. It was sheer madness, he said, to think they could live for ever on the dole in a country where taxation was staggering in its burden and where—for the first time since two centuries—there was an adverse balance of trade.

It was when he launched on to the moral side of the question and denounced the tyranny of the Trade Unions, the deliberate limitation of output among the men, and the general demoralisation of the working classes—incited, he said, to revolutionary ideas by paid agitators and fanatical leaders—that he was interrupted with some violence by his own son.

I saw Jocelyn lean forward with a sword-like flash of anger in his grey-blue eyes, and for the first time I noticed his likeness to his father.

"You're utterly unjust," he said bitterly. "You completely ignore the causes of discontent and the right—yes, the human and natural right—of these people to resist a lowering in the standard of life, and the foul cruelty of their conditions. By God, if I were a miner—threatened with starvation wages by coal-owners who don't care a damn for human life or decency so long as they get their profits and their dividends—I would go Bolshevik and raise hell! It wouldn't do any good, of course, but it would satisfy the rage in a man's soul."

There was a dead silence after this outburst. Frank Hardy glanced at me and raised his eyebrows, as much as to say, "Oh Lord! Now the fat's in the fire!" The Bishop's secretary—that fellow Caldicott—went very red for a moment and then paled. Lady Louisa gazed at her son with frightened eyes.

The Bishop was startled by the violence of his son's speech, and shocked. Yet, after that silence, he spoke more calmly than I had expected, though sternly enough.

"I don't like your language, Jocelyn, to say nothing of your ideas. If you will kindly remember the respect due to me as a father and as a priest, I will answer you. Otherwise I must beg you to leave this table. Not even from my own son will

I tolerate blasphemy, or Bolshevism—which is the same thing.”

“I’m not a Bolshevik,” said Jocelyn sullenly. “I’m all for the Labour Party, which is constitutional. But anyhow, I’m on the side of the miners and their families, who are pawning their underclothes and getting into debt because the owners want to force them down to the dirt again.”

The Bishop crumbled a piece of bread by his side. I could see that he was endeavouring to keep his self-control. His voice was only half a tone harsher when he spoke again.

“I regret that a son of mine—even though his university career has ended in disgrace—should show such lamentable ignorance of economic laws and political moralities.”

“On the contrary!” said Jocelyn irritably.

His father ignored the interruption.

“I refrain from discussing the meaning of this coal crisis—the secret forces behind it—and the revolutionary character with which it is developing. I am dealing with all that in my sermon to-morrow. But I will only say now, Jocelyn, that anyone who believes that the Labour Party is pledged to constitutional methods and will not use its power to overthrow the monarchy and the good old traditions of this ancient realm is utterly deluded. They pose as a constitutional party, loyal to England, but their actions and their recent history betray them. They have a sentimental allegiance to Bolshevik Russia. Their trade unions, from which they get their power and funds, are seething with Communists. Many of their leaders are in receipt of Bolshevik money which is paid them to corrupt and undermine the Constitution and liberties of this country.”

“There’s not a word of truth in it, father,” said Jocelyn. “It’s a confounded libel, and I wish to heaven you wouldn’t say such things! They make a mockery of those clothes you wear.”

The boy spoke with a passion which flamed in his eyes and made his voice harsh, reminding me again of the father to whom he made this violent outburst.

“Jocelyn!” cried Lady Louisa. “Control yourself, my dear. You ought not to speak to your father like that.”

There was an expression of fear—quite pitiable—on her pale face as she looked at her husband. Then, for a moment,

her eyes met those of Caldicott, the Bishop's secretary, and there was a quick message between them. He shrugged his shoulders, almost imperceptibly, as though to say, "I can do nothing."

The Bishop's face became a little grey, but it assumed an almost awful sternness, which I have only seen once before on any human face, and that was when a famous judge sentenced a murderer to death.

"Leave this table!" he said. "Do not let me see you again to-night. To-morrow I will deal with you."

"Rot, father!" said Jocelyn. "I'm going to finish my dinner. You forget that Nancy and I are grown-up and can't be sent supperless to bed for being naughty. It's ridiculous at this epoch of the world's history."

He helped himself deliberately to some potatoes, but I could see that his hand shook. It was not without nerve-strain that he challenged this formidable father.

The Bishop stood up from his chair, tall and straight. He gave a command to the two menservants standing by the side-board and watching this scene with slanting eyes.

"Jenkins—Edwards—take Master Jocelyn up to his room. If he resists, use what strength is necessary. You have my authority."

It was an incredible situation. Such a thing might have happened in the Middle Ages—did happen many times between father and son—but that I should see it in the twentieth century was past belief, even as I sat at this table. But I had actually come back, it seemed, to the Middle Ages. This hall with its timbered roof and its panelled walls, those servants in black livery, this Bishop with his stern, ascetic face, ruling supreme in this fortress palace, spiritually out of touch with modern life, with its new liberties and moralities, gave me an illusion of having slipped out of modern England.

Jocelyn was also standing up from the table. His face was quite pale now, and his eyes shone with an intense anger.

"Father," he said in a low, vibrant voice. "I give you warning that if those fellows lay a finger on me I'll break every bone in their bodies. As for you, it's time you learnt that parental tyranny belongs to the past. Yes—and all the cruel

intolerance which is crushing mother's spirit and making Nancy ready to fly off with the first fool who offers her a chance of escape from this prison-house of intolerance. Good God, sir! I should have thought your religion—the religion you stuffed down my throat until I sickened at its bigotry—would have taught you something at least in the way of sympathy and the ordinary decencies of human intercourse. . . . Instead of humiliating your son before your own guests.”

The Bishop's expression did not alter in its stern mask.

He stretched out his hand with an air of command not to be disobeyed by mortal men.

“Jenkins—Edwards—did you not hear me? Take this boy up to his room.”

“Rupert!” said Lady Louisa, addressing her husband in a faint voice, “I beseech you! It is—it is—most painful. Jocelyn is not a boy any longer.”

“Silence, Louisa,” said the Bishop.

The two menservants advanced upon Jocelyn. They were tall fellows, but it was quite clear that they did not like their job. They liked it less at the first touch on the boy's shoulders. He jibbed like a colt, and, with clenched fist, struck a blow at one of the men so that he reeled back. The other retreated hurriedly.

Then with his hands in his pockets and an assumption of complete indifference, Jocelyn spoke to his father again.

“That's that, father. But I'll spare you my presence any further on this night of joyous homecoming.”

He walked slowly down the length of the dining-room with his head held high and an easy, athletic stride. He was the son of his father, though the child of modern thought, with its lack of respect, its revolt against authority, its sense of liberty.

Lady Louisa was in tears. Caldicott, the clerical secretary, looked horribly uncomfortable. Frank Hardy glanced at me again, but without humour. The Bishop resumed his seat and turned to me with an impassive face.

“The younger generation has no sense of discipline,” he said. “Unless we get back to that, this old country of ours is doomed to destruction.”

I had written something of the same sort in a recent article, and yet, when I saw this object-lesson in parental discipline, it seemed to me a painful and impossible anachronism. The boy had certainly been wrong in addressing his father with such extreme violence, but it was preposterous for any father to hand his son over to flunkeys and order his forcible removal from the dinner-table. Half my sympathy at least, if not more than half, was with that proud and sensitive boy, who, as youth will mostly be, was on the side of rebellion against authority; while all my sympathy without any reservations was on the side of Nancy and her short skirt. Good heavens, as though human society would be shipwrecked and morality destroyed by the sight of a young girl's pretty legs!

The Bishop spent an hour with me in his drawing-room over coffee and discussed the international situation with knowledge and sagacity, though again with a strong defence of the most Conservative side of thought. I wasn't surprised that he had a profound admiration for Mussolini, and believed that England needed a leader of that kind. He even went as far as desiring the re-establishment of monarchy in Germany, as he was contemptuous, he said, of republican forms of government, and could see no virtue at all in democracy, which he thought had proved its essential absurdity.

"Why," he asked, "should an ignorant majority enforce its desires, follies, greeds and passions upon an intelligent minority, better educated, trained to rule, raised above the catchwords and fallacies of mob psychology? The thing is too ridiculous to argue about. That sister of mine—Elizabeth—makes me very impatient with her democratic nonsense."

I refrained from argument, though I did not agree with him. In his own palace and with black-liveried flunkeys to throw out those who disagreed with him, the Bishop was in a strong position. Besides, to tell the truth, the whole atmosphere of this ecclesiastical residence intimidated me. Lady Louisa's troubled eyes, always anxious and fearful, the florid secretary's furtiveness and cringing consent to his Lordship's expressions of opinion, and even Frank Hardy's nervousness, began to infect me with a sense of timidity.

XVI

I RETIRED to bed early under pretext of having proofs to correct, and the Bishop himself departed to his study with Caldicott. Frank Hardy remained behind with Lady Louisa, but when I said good night to him he murmured something about his room being down the same passage, and accompanied it with a slight depression of the right eyelid which suggested hidden meanings.

As a matter of fact, I sat up reading in my dismal and chilly bedroom, absorbed in a new novel by a favourite author of mine, and it was past eleven o'clock before I heard a tap at my door. At my answer Hardy appeared, and closed the door behind him, and then laughed quietly.

"I was bagged by the Bishop again," he said. "The old man had been examining my catalogue of his books, and was seriously displeased over technical details. Well, that's over, thank heaven! Now for a little fun. Nancy and Jocelyn are giving a party in my room. You're one of the invited guests! I've some excellent whisky, and Nancy dances like a sylph and promises you the next fox-trot on Jocelyn's gramophone."

"Dancing!" I said, pretending to be aghast at the thought, not without a touch of sincerity. "A gramophone in this fortress palace! No, my dear lad, you can't make me believe that—and if it's true, it's very dangerous. Supposing the Bishop interrupts that party in your room? Good heavens, the thought appals me!"

"That's all right," he said. "We're in a different wing. The old man can't hear a sound."

He broke out into a passionate protest against life in a Bishop's palace.

"This job of mine! Good Lord, sir, it'll kill me if I stay here much longer! You've no idea—the tyranny—the intolerance—the gloom—the uneasy fear—the sense of guilt in this

household that creeps over one. He is the greatest man I've ever met; great in virtue, strength, and honesty of purpose, untiring in his devotion, as hard on himself as he is on others. But he'd curdle the milk of human kindness by one glint of the steel in his eyes. That scene at supper with young Jocelyn—did you ever see anything like it? And that cruelty to poor little Nancy. Incredible!"

He thrust a hand through his hair and laughed again.

"If it hadn't been for Nancy and her laughing spirit, I think this old palace would have been worse than a prison. As it is . . ."

He didn't finish that particular sentence, but reiterated his invitation to the party in his room. I hesitated about accepting it. The night was getting on, and I didn't want to be involved in any family "ructions," as a guest of the Bishop and his lady. However, Hardy overcame my scruples, and I went to his room. It was a larger room than mine—four times larger—and furnished as a bed-sitting-room. The bed itself was the most noticeable piece of furniture—one of those old four-posters with heavy curtains of green brocade, faded and threadbare after many generations of slumberers. There were old prints on the walls, of ecclesiastical dignitaries in wigs and gowns, and one or two book-cases stuffed with old tomes. Hardy had pushed a table on one side to give space on the polished boards, and on the table he had placed a whisky-bottle and three glasses within arm's length of a gramophone which Jocelyn was winding up, and for which Nancy was selecting another record.

It was Nancy, in her rose-coloured frock, who greeted my arrival with a friendly wave of the hand and a welcoming smile.

"I hope you're not shocked," she said. "But Frank tells me that you've been having a dreadful time with father, and Jocelyn and I had an idea that you might like to join the children's hour."

"Delighted," I assured her. "And honoured by your confidence."

"It's because of your books," she was kind enough to say. "You always seem on the side of youth."

"Heart and soul," I told her. "Though sometimes I see the point of view of old age too, to which one day I shall have to be reconciled."

"Years hence!" she answered generously, and then stood up, with a pretty audacity, to show herself.

"Candidly," she asked, "as a man of high ideals and good taste, do you consider this frock indecent?"

I measured the length of the skirt with my eye. It was not a long journey, I admit.

"I think it charming," I said. "I can find no fault with it. Even for a Bishop's daughter."

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Hardy, with his quiet humorous smile. "That's exactly my verdict."

"Yes, but you're not reliable, Frank," laughed Nancy. "You're too easy-going, you know!"

"Not at all," said that young man, looking at her with shy adoration. "I have a natural austerity of soul."

It was Jocelyn who now demanded my attention.

"I ask you, sir," he said, "as a man half way between the old crowd and the young, what is a fellow to do with a father like that? What hope is there for humanity, to say nothing of Nancy and me, when such intolerance remains unchecked? It makes one hate religion and all its works. I'm being driven into aggressive atheism by a man who professes to be a spiritual lord of the Christian Church. If my father is a leading example of Christianity, then give me paganism. As for politics, I'm hanged if I don't go Bolshevik! Intolerance like that can only be overthrown by blood and terror."

"Now then, Jocelyn," said Nancy, "don't raise the Red Flag at this time of night! You know you're talking abject nonsense. Put on that record while Frank and I give an exhibition dance."

"Yes; and won't you have a whisky, sir?" asked Frank. "I remember that brown sherry of yours when I was greatly in need of it."

I declined the whisky, but noticed that young Jocelyn poured himself out a stiff dose—not for the first time, I imagined, looking at his flushed face.

Frank Hardy and Nancy danced with a charming grace,

which I found fascinating to watch, but I felt uneasy at their exhibition. It was alarmingly clear that Frank had found a complete cure for boredom in the society of this lively girl, and as I knew he was a penniless ex-officer, with a very thin chance of a good job if he lost his present billet, it seemed to me that he was asking for trouble. It was enchanting to fall in love with a pretty girl, of course, but what would he say to his Lordship, the Bishop, when love became impatient of delay?

Young Jocelyn confided his troubles to me, while the gramophone played stridently to the tune of "What'll I do?"

"If it weren't for an adverse bank balance, I'd cut free to-morrow—except that I'm beastly sorry for the mater and that kid, Nancy. I hardly like to leave them to the untrammelled savagery of that ecclesiastical tyrant who happens to be my honoured father. The joke of the thing is that David Swayne wants me to stand for Labour in the next election. He says his father could get me nominated. Up here, I mean. There'll be a bit of a sensation when the son of a Bishop of Burpham attacks the very stronghold of his father's domain. The deuce of a joke, and I'm looking forward to it."

He poured himself out another whisky, and drank it at a gulp.

"I'd go easy with that stuff, young fellow," I said, putting my hand on his arm.

"That's all right," he said carelessly. "It's a spiritual protest against parental tyranny and ecclesiasticism." He had some difficulty with the last word, I noticed.

"If I were you," I suggested, "I'd cultivate a sense of humour and meet your father half way, without exasperating him. There's a lot to be said on his side, you know."

"I fail to observe it," said young Jocelyn. "I see nothing on his side but the intolerance of the Dark Ages."

Later in the evening—as a matter of fact it was well after midnight—he became cheerful and insisted on standing on Hardy's oak table and making a sham oration to the miners, as a future Labour Member. I am bound to say he was rather comical, for the boy had a strain of genius in him, and Hardy encouraged him by chuckles of laughter. But I was rather

scared by all the noise he made, and I could see that Nancy was also getting alarmed. She tried to quieten him, and whispered to Hardy that he ought to take the boy to bed. He was at the height of his political eloquence, denouncing the entrenched prerogatives of the capitalist class, and pointing a finger of withering scorn at "an elderly ecclesiastic in this city who is the champion of clerical tyranny," when the door opened, and I observed with dismay the figure of the Bishop of Burpham regarding the scene. Nancy was dancing the tango with Frank Hardy, her pretty head resting against his shoulder, while young Jocelyn was standing on the table with the empty whisky-bottle in his right hand, which he was brandishing with solemn and noble gestures.

The Bishop's voice intoned through the room with a terrible harshness which brought Hardy and Nancy to a standstill, still in each other's arms.

"What is the meaning of this disgusting orgy?" asked the Bishop.

He was in his dressing-gown—a garment of purple silk, tied round his waist by a cord. Most men look ridiculous in their dressing-gowns, but I am bound to say that the Bishop of Burpham gave me the impression of a Roman Emperor about to proclaim sentence of martyrdom upon early Christians.

There was a terrible silence among us for a moment, and I saw Jocelyn lower the whisky-bottle and descend from the table in a clumsy way, so that the tablecloth became entangled about his legs.

It was Hardy who spoke first, with some kind of explanation which was rather feeble.

"We were having a little fun, sir. As a matter of fact it—er—happens to be my birthday. I was giving a little party, which your son and daughter very kindly accepted. Also my friend here, who is—er—a very pillar of propriety!"

He laughed weakly, but the Bishop was not impressed by the explanation.

"You are dismissed from my service," he said harshly. "Not content with spoiling my catalogue, I see that you are also corrupting the morals of my family. You are a disgrace to your caste as an officer and gentleman."

He turned to Nancy, and there was a break in his voice when he addressed her.

"As for you, Nancy. I am astounded and bewildered! Shocked and heartbroken! I find my daughter arrayed in a garment of immorality and in the embrace of a man who betrays my trust in him. After midnight in his bedroom! On the Lord's day! Have you no modesty, no sense of shame? Have you become a harlot in your father's house?"

"Father!" cried Nancy. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

She put her hands before her face and burst into tears.

He made a gesture as though expelling her from his very heart.

"Go to your own room!"

Then he spoke to Jocelyn.

"I overheard some of your words. You mock at the man who gave you life. That is unforgivable, but what I can forgive even less is this carelessness of your sister's honour."

"Bosh!" said Jocelyn. "Undiluted nonsense, father!"

"Leave this room," said the Bishop, "or I will thrash you as you have never been thrashed since you told me your first lie."

Even I had to suffer a rebuke which, to some extent, I felt that I had certainly deserved.

"I received you as an honoured guest. You have forfeited my good opinion, sir."

He would not listen to a word we said in self-defence, and silenced the passionate protestations of Nancy, who implored him to be "sensible."

"Go to your rooms," said the Bishop again, and to our rooms we went, Nancy and Jocelyn and I, while he stood outside Hardy's door before closing it behind him for an interview with his "deputy assistant librarian," which made me sorry for that indiscreet young man.

Nancy touched me on the arm before slipping past with a laugh which was half a sob.

"Sorry!" she said. "We led you into it."

Jocelyn lurched for a moment against the wall of the passage. His hair was disordered and his face flushed.

"I'm a blooming Bolshevik!" he said solemnly. "The Bishop and the Bolshevik! . . . Darned funny! . . . I'll write a play about it."

"Come to bed, my dear!" whispered Nancy. "And don't forget your prayers. You'll need them in the morning!"

She kissed her hand to me as she grabbed Jocelyn's arm and steered him down the passage into the darkness of a corridor which went off at right angles through a Norman-looking arch.

In my own room I could not help laughing a little at this first evening's experience in the Bishop's palace, but it was with an uneasy sense of guilt and divided sympathies.

XVII

AT breakfast next morning I found myself alone, and was relieved when Hardy appeared, with his quiet humourous smile, though he looked as if he had not slept much that night and seemed somewhat worried in spite of his smile.

"I'm afraid I've let you down rather badly," he said after our morning greetings. "The Bishop took the flesh off my bones last night and I belong to the army of unemployed again. I'm going up to London by the four o'clock train."

"And then?" I asked.

"I shall have to find another job," he said rather gloomily, though he laughed quietly at the dismal prospect.

He helped himself to something off the sideboard, but stood there, forgetting his breakfast, and after a quick glance towards the door as though afraid of the servants, spoke to me in a low voice.

"I think I ought to tell you. . . . It's time I went, anyhow. . . . The fact is that Nancy and I have found out that—well, the truth is we're wonderfully in love with each other."

I gave a little whistle of dismay, though I had guessed his secret, which had been obvious enough last night.

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked. "It's a bit awkward, isn't it—without a job?"

"I know!" he said, and stood there staring at the tablecloth with a tragic smile.

"I blame myself," he said. "I oughtn't to have let it happen. I feel the most frightful cad. But you see, it was lonely here at first, and splendid to talk to Nancy and hear her laughter in this gloomy place, and go for walks with her sometimes."

"Very dangerous," I said—"those walks."

He agreed with a faint smile about his lips, but with a line of worry between his eyes.

"She seemed just a child. I had no idea of anything like that. We talked about books—she reads a lot, you know—and we discussed the war and life, and so on."

"Worse and worse!" I said, with a touch of irony which was lost on him.

"She's writing a novel," he told me. "Perfectly marvellous stuff, though rather alarming in its candour. We used to talk it over, and of course I was tremendously interested and gave her one or two points about things she didn't know—some of my experiences as an out-of-work officer and all that. Anyhow, we saw too much of each other. I can see that now. The inevitable happened, of course. I mean as far as I'm concerned."

"What sort of inevitability?" I asked, with a sense of alarm.

He glanced at me in a shy, embarrassed way.

"I had a rough time in the war," he said by way of self-defence. "I've been damned lonely ever since. When Nancy said she loved me, one day—I hadn't asked her—it seemed to me the most marvellous thing in the world. Of course I knew I was a cad, and tried to avoid her for some days and pretended I had work to do, but she knows perfectly well that I tremble like an aspen leaf if she even looks at me, and that I love her in the most ridiculous way—I mean as much as any fellow could love a girl like that, so exquisite and child-like."

"My dear lad," I said, "you're in a bad way. What's the Bishop going to say about it?"

"He doesn't know," said Hardy. "I've been living in a state of terror lest he should find out. One night——"

He hesitated and then was silent.

"One night?" I asked.

"It was nothing," he said, "only it gave me rather a scare, for Nancy's sake. She slipped into my room before going to bed, to bring back a book I had lent her. She's perfectly simple and innocent—like a young sister. It was a moonlight night and I had the blinds drawn and we stood there talking, and looking out into the garden, and at the cathedral with all its tracery touched by the moonlight—like silver, you know.

Nancy sees that sort of thing—the enchantment of it. I said, ‘You ought to go to bed,’ but she said she wasn’t sleepy. Then I said, ‘You ought not to stay in my bedroom. It’s not supposed to be proper.’ But she could not see any sense in that. She put her hand on my shoulder and spoke some lines out of Shakespeare about soft stillness and the night and all that. You may remember it? Anyhow, while we were talking there, the Bishop came out on to the terrace below my window. We could see his black figure pacing slowly up the gravelled path. He stopped and called out, ‘Who is that talking? Is it Nancy’s voice?’

“She wanted to answer him and call out in her laughing way, but I suddenly saw the frightful fix we were in. Nancy’s room was on the other side of the house, and the Bishop knew my window, and it was after midnight. I whispered to her and said, ‘For God’s sake don’t answer!’ The Bishop listened and passed. And Nancy could not understand my blue funk!”

“When did that happen?” I asked, rather dismayed by this narrative.

“Two nights ago,” said Hardy. “You see, it’s a good thing the Bishop has given me the sack, and I’m telling you all this because it’s only fair after what you’ve done for me. You and Miss Pomeroy. . . . I’ve made a perfect fool of myself. I’m desperately ashamed.”

It seemed to me that Nancy had made a fool of this young man and tempted him beyond his strength. I could see that she had thrown herself into his arms almost, and yet, as he said, and as I believed, in simplicity and innocence. She had not the worldly knowledge of my niece, Lettice, and in this old palace knew nothing of life but what she read in books and found in her own heart. I was sorry for both of them.

Hardy used a phrase which I remembered in one of his letters.

“There’s nothing to do but cut and run.”

“Back to Elizabeth’s lodging-house?” I asked rather grimly.

“Back to bed-sitting-rooms and odd jobs,” he said, with a pluck that was rather gallant I thought. But then he groaned in a whimsical way and his voice broke when he spoke again, though he covered his emotion with a laugh.

"I shall leave my heart behind—that's the worst of it!"

"What about Nancy's heart?" I asked.

He avoided my eyes and answered quietly: "She's only a child. She'll forget all right."

He remembered his breakfast, and played at eating some porridge, but I noticed that his hand trembled.

"What about Lady Louisa?" I asked. "Does she know anything about this love-affair? What does she say on the subject?"

Hardy shrugged his shoulders.

"The poor lady hasn't a will of her own. If she hadn't been crushed by long years of suppression there might be another—tragedy. That fellow Caldicott is a bit of a swine."

"Good heavens!" I said, and remembered that exchange of glances between the Bishop's lady and the florid cleric—the scared look in the eyes of my pale hostess when she saw Caldicott's gaze upon her.

Hardy gave a quick sigh and then confessed to a morbid thought.

"I'm getting afraid of human nature! I don't know which I hate more—weakness or intolerance. It seems to be the eternal conflict of life. It's hard to keep between the two."

"Only by prayer and fasting," I suggested. "But since I've been in this house I'm hardening against intolerance. It doesn't seem to work. I believe in charity and human kindness."

"You won't hear it this morning," said Hardy. "I heard the Bishop dictate his sermon to Caldicott. It's a violent attack on the morals of the miners. He says that every striker is a traitor to England, and every man who lives on the dole is a thief of other people's money. It's not diluted at all by the milk of human kindness."

"It won't help things in this district," I remarked. "Can't we persuade him to modify it?"

Hardy was amused at my simplicity.

"An Act of Parliament wouldn't induce the Bishop to modify a comma of what he thinks is the truth that is in him. Nor the British Army with machine guns and tanks."

XVIII

I HEARD that sermon in Burpham Cathedral. Nancy sat by my side, rather red-eyed because Frank Hardy was leaving that afternoon, and on the other side of me was young Jocelyn, headachy and sullen after what had happened the night before, but sufficiently chastened to come to church so as to avoid another cause of quarrel. Sitting there between that boy and girl, the beauty of the old cathedral stole into my senses, and I thought of all the ghosts of English history who once, in the living flesh, had come here to kneel on these stones, with some prayer in their hearts against life's cruelty and tragedy and sin. In the days of the old Catholic faith the great highway of this nave had led up to an altar glimmering with many candles, glinting with the golden vestments of the priests, clouded with sweet-smelling incense. Now it was all rather cold and bare, but lovely colour still glowed through the painted windows and fell like rose-petals upon the Norman piers. Above, through the clerestory windows, the sunlight shot long shafts of light between the arches.

In the Middle Ages the nave and transepts would have been crowded with knights and squires, merchants and guildsmen in furred cloaks, slashed doublets and leather jerkins. The women, in their horned head-dresses and white wimples, would have sat apart from the men. There would have been more colour, more variety of costume, among those who came to worship here. Those who sat about me and behind were in the drab clothes of modernity in a mining city. Many of the poorer women were obviously miners' wives, rather wan and worn, and with an over-strained look, as though life were hard on them. Some of them wore their workaday shawls over their heads, though the younger girls were neatly dressed in London style. There were not many men whom I could pick out as miners. Probably the religious element among their

crowd went to Nonconformist chapels rather than to this Anglican cathedral with a Bishop notoriously hostile to their claims. But here and there were sturdy, grizzled men of the older generation, who bent their heads in prayer and followed the service with a humble piety which seemed to me very touching. No Bolsheviks among that lot, anyhow! After a life of toil in a dirty and dangerous job, they still had faith in God and no hatred in their hearts.

I felt distressed when the Bishop stood in the Jacobean pulpit and delivered that amazing sermon which aroused such bitter feeling, such a storm of controversy, when it was reported in the Press. I need not repeat it here. It will be remembered by most people as a scathing indictment of the mining community of Burpham, whom he accused of sloth, greed, and anarchy. He gave out as his text "If a man shall not work, neither shall he eat," and then, in cold, deliberate sentences, formulated a most damning analysis of the spiritual sickness which had befallen the working classes not only of Burpham but of England. The curse of the dole had led to the demoralisation of the younger men. The evil temptings of political agitators paid for by foreign gold—"as I have proof," he said—was leading to the ruin of the coal-fields and the downfall of British trade in every industry. At the bottom of it all, he said, was, not a claim to economic justice but a desire to overthrow the constitution of society and the laws of God and man, in order that sensual pleasures might be satisfied without sacrifice or honest toil. It was that mad desire for "a good time" on earth which had overtaken the peoples of Europe and was putting out the lights of heaven. It was the lure of the cinema, the mania of betting, the foul atmosphere of the public-house, the immorality of women—greedy for immodest frocks and vicious entertainment—the weakening and abandonment of the old moralities of English life, which had warped the working classes from their old allegiance to duty and discipline. The people were as putty in the hands of evil leaders, who tempted them, as the Devil had tempted Christ, by a false vision of power and wealth. . . .

As he spoke the Bishop's voice rang out louder and clearer, his eyes were on fire with an inner passion, his thin hand was

stretched out in warning and denunciation, his ascetic face became more pallid under stress of emotion, and, dropping his notes, he proceeded with a sonorous eloquence that would have been vastly impressive if one had believed in the truth of his terrible indictment.

To some extent I believed in its truth. Doubtless there was an element of truth in it. In all communities of men and women there is greed, sloth, vice, human frailty. Savonarola could stand in any market-place or public square in any city of the world to-day and castigate the sins of society. In the noblest and best of men, as well as in the lowest and worst, there is plenty of cause for confession and repentance. Undoubtedly some of the miners were a loose-living lot, some of them were out for anarchy, some of them had listened to agents of Bolshevism with willing ears—a few hot-heads, a few embittered men. But, as I thought then, and as I still think, the great body of miners, in spite of evil and stupid leaders, were a fine and splendid crowd, made a little desperate by the threat of low wages, dogged in their determination not to be beaten down below a decent standard of life, but honest and simple men, ready to do a good day's work in return for a fair wage, and hating and fearing more than anything else in life the horror of unemployment and the demoralisation of a miserable "dole."

Before the Bishop had got very far in his sermon, I could hear the sound of whispering about me. Some of the women with shawls over their heads began to sob. The grizzled men beside them began to look distressed and sullen. In one of the pews in front of me a young man with a shock of black hair was taking down the sermon in shorthand, and looked excited over his job. But the most restless fellow in the cathedral was young Jocelyn. He shifted in his seat noisily, breathed hard, and even swore loud enough for me to hear his words, and several times said "My God!" with a kind of rage. Nancy put her hand on his knee and said "Hush!"—but he was not to be calmed down. Once or twice I thought he was about to interrupt his father's sermon by a passionate protest, and presently, indeed, he stood up in the pew, thrusting a nervous hand through his fair hair.

"This is intolerable!" he said, in a low vibrant voice, clearly heard by the people about us. Then he gathered up his hat and gloves and stalked down the nave with tightened lips and a fury in his eyes. Everybody turned their heads to watch him go, knowing him as "Master Jocelyn," the Bishop's son, and, as I knew afterwards, loving him because he sat in their cottages, bought 'baccy for the men, played football with their boys, and winked at all their pretty girls.

At luncheon that day Jocelyn did not appear. A note was brought to the Bishop by one of the footmen, who said: "Mr. Jocelyn asked me to give you this, my lord." The Bishop opened it, and adjusted his pince-nez to read some pencil-scribbled lines. Then the line of his mouth hardened a little and he passed the note to his wife without a word.

She read it silently, and I saw a look of anguish in her eyes and a sudden mist of tears. Poor lady! Nancy had been weeping already, I thought, and Hardy found it difficult to bring a smile to her lips by an occasional attempt to brighten things up. I found the Bishop's conversation very trying in the midst of all this gloom.

In the afternoon Hardy came to my room to say good-bye. He looked nervous and distressed.

"Well, good-bye, sir! You know how grateful I am to you for getting me this job. I'm sorry it ends like this."

"I shall see you in town," I told him. "This house is getting on my nerves. I shall go to-morrow."

"Jocelyn has gone already," he remarked, with a nervous laugh. "And I don't blame him. . . . I expect I shall find him on my train."

It was what I had guessed, and I was not astonished.

"It will be a sad blow to his mother," I said. "I suppose Nancy knows?"

Hardy nodded.

"She's very much cut up about it. She and Jocelyn are great pals."

He grasped my hand, said "Thanks again!" and then left the room.

I held the door open to watch him go as he carried his bags down the passage from his own room. As I was closing the

door again I saw Nancy slip by. She was wearing a fur coat and one of those little *cloche* hats which were all the fashion. There was an eager look in her eyes, and a kind of furtiveness in her quick rush down the corridor. It was easy to guess, I thought, that she was going to the station with Hardy to get his last kiss before the train left. She would miss that humble lover of hers.

An hour later the Bishop called me down to his study after the evening service in the cathedral, which I did not attend. When I had closed the door, he handed me the pencil-written note I had seen at luncheon, and asked me to read it.

"You understand the younger generation," he said. "At least, my wife tells me you write books about them. How do you interpret this? It's the letter of a modern son to a father who has given him every opportunity in life, forgiven him many faults, and brought him up in a Christian home, with Christian principles. Explain the riddle to me."

It was an abusive letter from Jocelyn, and a painful one.

"After your sermon to-day I would rather starve to death than sit at your table or sleep under your roof. You made an outrageous attack upon defenceless people who could not answer your libels. There is more Christianity in the miners' cottages than in a Church which allows a man like you to preach a gospel of hatred and intolerance. I am going to London, and if I ever come to Burpham it will be in the cause of Labour and in defence of those you have cruelly maligned. My only regret in going is that I have no chance of protecting mother from your slow torture and Nancy from your tyranny. . . ."

I heard the Bishop's voice again as I came to the end of the note with the scrawling signature of Jocelyn.

"Is there any excuse—any possible forgiveness—for a son who writes a letter like that? Is he insane, do you think, or has he fallen into the hands of anarchists?"

I looked up at the Bishop standing there in his grave dignity, so sure of himself, so convinced of his own views of truth, so incapable of understanding the need for tolerance.

"My lord," I said, "it's a tragic letter for a father to read. May I tell you what I think about it?"

"I have asked you," said the Bishop gravely.

"To me," I said, taking my courage in both hands, "it seems inspired by the generous passion of youth."

"Generous passion?" said the Bishop. "Generous, did you say?"

He was astounded. I saw a slight colour creep beneath his pallid skin.

"Yes," I said. "For liberty and humanity and fair play."

"I fail to understand," he said sharply. "Do you defend those insults from my son? Are you on the side of anarchy?"

"I heard your sermon to-day," I continued. "It seemed to me too hard—and rather cruel. Perhaps your boy has heard other sermons of the same kind, just as unfair, addressed to him or his sister. I'm not astonished at his revolt. It was inevitable. There are other things in life than duty and discipline."

"What?" asked the Bishop harshly, and I could see that he was enormously disturbed.

"Charity, and kindliness, and comradeship, and laughter," I said. "I think Jocelyn may have missed them in this palace of yours, and in your relations with him. Forgive me for speaking like this, but you asked my opinion."

The Bishop turned his back upon me and crossed to one of the windows, and looked out to the cathedral across the courtyard; I could see his hands twisting and untwisting behind his back. He stood there with bent head for quite a time, and then turned sharply again and came towards me.

He held out his hand, and I felt the strong clasp of his thin fingers.

"I am obliged to you," he said. "Few people have the courage to talk to me like that. There may be something in what you say. I may be too hard in my conceptions of right and wrong. I may be slightly intolerant of other people's views. . . . But I detest flabbiness of character. I tremble for England because of all this weakening of the old moralities. Am I wrong in that? If I do wrong there, then there is no truth in me, and I am a blind old fool."

He was a little broken. My words, too hard perhaps, had cut under the philosophy of his whole life. I was sorry for the man then, as I stood alone with him in his study, and more sorry a little later in the afternoon when his wife came into the room and stumbled towards him with a cry of anguish. It was twilight outside, and the Bishop's study was in darkness. I do not think Lady Louisa saw me there, and anyhow, in her distress, she may not have cared.

"Oh, Daddy!" she cried, and that name would have struck me as comic, applied to this stern Bishop, but for the tragedy of the woman's cry.

"My dear!" he said, "what has happened?"

"Nancy has gone," she said with a kind of sob. "She has gone with Jocelyn. . . . Both my dear ones!"

"Do you mean that Nancy has left us?" asked the Bishop.

His voice trembled, and his hand stole up to his heart as though it hurt him there.

"It is your fault!" cried his wife. "You were too hard on them. You've been too hard on all of us. Oh, you have made us hate you with your hardness!"

I slipped out of the room, having no right to hear the rest of this tragedy between a Bishop and his wife. . . .

XIX

AFTER I had left the Bishop's study I went up to my own room and stood looking out of the window, enormously distressed by this tragic conflict between youth and age of which I had been a witness, hopelessly divided in my sympathies, bewildered by this clash of emotion in my mind. The Bishop was right in many of his words. There was wisdom and truth in them. He had expressed with greater power than anything I had written many thoughts and convictions which had been stirring in my own mind. And yet as a man of middle age, fifteen years younger than him, devoted to the younger crowd, with perhaps a little understanding of their point of view, with an almost weak sympathy for their spirit of youth, I could not bring myself to believe that intolerance was right. The Bishop had gone beyond the limit of parental authority in his treatment of young Jocelyn and that pretty Nancy. He had gone too far even in his sermon against the miners and their leaders. He had tried to rule by fear in his household, and obedience through fear is not a quality of modern youth or of English character. . . .

I was seized with a kind of panic when I thought of Nancy's flight with Frank Hardy. I had introduced that young man into this house. I was responsible in a way for his moral quality as a gentleman. Nancy had flung herself into his arms, and for a time he had resisted and held back, but now she had gone away with him, and there would be the devil to pay. I could not blame either of them. How can any of us blame the irresistible urge of love between two young hearts? Knowing ourselves and human nature, we can only groan and pray that youth may be delivered from temptation and saved from ruin and wretchedness.

At that window in the Bishop's palace, I hoped to God that Hardy might behave like a good fellow to this pretty child,

who was following him into poverty, and leaving her father's home and all her loyalties, and all safety, on this dangerous adventure of love with a man who had a kind of worship for her, but had no home to give her.

And while I was thinking these things Nancy came back! I saw her graceful young figure come striding across the lonely courtyard down there in the dusk. She was still carrying her handbag, which made me sure of her in the shadowy quadrangle. She walked quickly, raising her head to look up at the windows; then she disappeared through the old archway. I felt my heart beat with a sense of enormous relief and went to my bedroom door and held it ajar. It was almost dark in the corridor outside where Nancy must pass on her way to her bedroom. I heard the sound of her footsteps coming up the stone stairway. I heard another sound which made me very sorry for the child. She was sobbing, and when I went towards her I found her leaning with her head against the wall crying painfully. She had dropped her handbag, it had come unfastened, and her brush and comb had fallen out on to the stone floor.

I said "My dear" in a fatherly way and took her hand and raised it to my lips. It was wet with tears she had dashed from her eyes. Her sense of humour overcame her grief.

"It's all right," she said. "It's perfectly all right!"

She made a gallant effort to hide her distress and pretended that nothing was the matter. Nothing whatever!

"Tell me," I said. "Tell me. How can I help?"

For a moment she hesitated, as though inventing an excuse for tears. But then she raised her head and answered with a kind of comical candour:

"I wanted to run away with Frank. He wouldn't have me. He sent me back again. It's rather funny!"

"Thank God for that," I said. "Thank God for Frank Hardy."

"I love him," she told me, with a kind of defiance. "Why shouldn't I go with him? It's idiotic coming back like this—after packing up this bag, and writing to mother, and all that."

She looked down at the handbag which had become unfastened and stooped to pick up her brush and comb, and laughed

again in a shy nervous way as though she saw something absurd in this anti-climax.

"Your poor mother is terribly upset," I told her. "She will be overjoyed you have come back again."

"I can't stay here," said Nancy. She drew a deep breath and said: "I can't. . . . Father is impossible. . . . Without Frank I would rather die than stay here. . . ."

"Be patient," I said. "Wait till Frank gets a home for you. I'll try to help him."

She held out her hand to me and squeezed it tight as though holding me to that pledge of mine.

"He's awfully grateful to you," she said. "He says you're on our side. The side of youth. I think it's wonderful—at your age. You seem to understand."

At my age. Those words hurt. They seemed to make me a thousand years old. They seemed also to make me an accomplice of young anarchy and indiscipline and revolt against authority.

"God pardon me!" I said. "You young people have no morality. You break all the rules. You're a thorough bad lot."

She smiled out of her pretty wet eyes.

"Frank is old-fashioned like you. I shock him most frightfully sometimes, though I don't mean to! He was very angry when I met him on the platform and said 'I'm coming with you.' He sent me back with a flea in my ear. He went quite white when I put my hand on his arm and told him to take me with him. Jocelyn thought it was a jolly good idea. The stationmaster was watching us and I think he guessed."

She saw the comedy of it, and I liked her sense of humour, especially as she felt the tragedy of it, too, and was, I think, putting a brave mask over her emotion for my sake, and for pride's sake. This Bishop's daughter, so demure and simple in appearance, so innocent and frank in her way of speech, so charming and exquisite, as Frank thought and as I agreed, had a quality of character which reminded me of one of Shakespeare's women—Beatrice or Rosalind—whose laughter mingled with their tears and who had courage as well as grace. Nancy, like Rosalind, would have followed her lover in men's

clothes under the greenwood tree. She had wanted to follow Frank to less pleasant places—the squalour of mean streets in London, the poverty of an ex-officer's life unemployed. It was very naughty of her, but rather plucky, and I couldn't be angry, I could only be glad that Frank had seen the folly of it, the desperate consequences of such adventure. With her hand on his arm on that grimy station platform, with this girl's eyes passionate with love for him, with Jocelyn thinking it a jolly good idea, some divine grace in him must have helped him to resist temptation and send her back, hurt, humiliated, and tearful. He had behaved according to the old code of honour. He was pre-war and not post-war, I thought, in his unselfishness and self-discipline. Not for a few joyous hours of love would he drag this girl down to the squalour that awaited him, nor take advantage of her innocence—was it innocence?—as many a selfish blackguard would have done. I thanked God for Frank Hardy, and the old tradition.

While we stood there talking for these few minutes, there was a rustle of a silk dress down the corridor. The timid voice of Lady Louisa called out, "Nancy, is that you, my dear?"

Nancy broke away from me and that mask of comedy fell from her and I heard her crying again.

IT was that evening in the precincts of his palace, not far from the west door of the cathedral to which he had gone to pray, that the Bishop was struck on the head by a stone flung at him from the darkness. One of the maidservants standing with her young man behind one of the buttresses—for a little quiet lovemaking, I suppose—heard her master's cry and saw him fall. He was brought in bleeding from a nasty cut, and laid on the sofa in the library, where a doctor was summoned to him, after Lady Louisa had flung herself on her knees beside him, believing that his swoon meant death, while Caldicott stood by, stroking his well-shaven chin with a plump white hand, and looking strangely ill at ease. Nancy knew nothing of it, having gone to bed to cry her eyes out, as afterwards I heard. Curiously, the Bishop's first words on coming to were addressed to me.

"Wasn't I right?" he asked feebly. "Can one be tolerant to blackguards like that?"

I did not argue with him, with that wound on his head, but it seemed to me that the violence of his sermon had led to this cowardly assault, as intolerance will always breed cruelty.

It was an hour later, I think, that is to say at about a quarter to ten, that I was aware of a vague murmur of voices outside the palace, approaching from one of the outer courtyards. The Bishop was dozing in a big armchair after his head had been stitched up by the young doctor, who was smoking a cigarette and chatting to me in low tones. Lady Louisa had retired to her room again.

"Yes!" said the doctor, seeing me raise my head and listen. "I am wondering what that noise means. It sounds like a crowd. . . . Queer, at this time of night!"

He went quietly to the windows and drew a heavy curtain

on one side, and I could see over his shoulder some moving points of light.

"It looks like a gang of men," said the doctor, "carrying torches."

Through the closed windows I could hear the tramp of boots into the inner courtyard, and what had been a vague rumour of voices rose to a shout—still muffled because the windows were shut, but distinct enough for us to hear some words.

"Down with the Bishop! . . . To hell with the Bishop!"

Inside the room the Bishop awakened from his slumber, due to some sedative which the doctor had given him.

"Is anyone calling me?" he asked.

"It is nothing," said the doctor quietly.

"A dream, perhaps," said the Bishop, and closed his eyes again until the clamour grew louder, when he grasped the arms of his chair and stood up, unsteadily, and stared towards the window.

"Strange!" he said. "People are calling me."

The door opened and Caldicott came in. There was an expression of extreme fear on his face, and when he spoke his voice trembled.

"My lord!" he said, "there is a mob outside! They are very threatening. . . . I think we ought to leave the place at once."

He shrank back against the door as another shout seemed to shatter against the windows.

"Leave what place, Caldicott?" asked the Bishop calmly.

"This place, my lord. Don't you understand? Your life—all our lives—are in grave danger! This is more than a riot—it is revolution. The beginning——"

"Nonsense!" said the Bishop. "Some rowdy boys. Tell the servants to go and knock their heads together."

I admired his courage, his dignity, his pride, after that nasty wound of his. I could see him listening intently to the noise outside, and some understanding of its meaning seemed to come to him.

He turned away from Caldicott and spoke to the young doctor.

"What do you think, doctor? Is it serious—or only some skylarking? They are shouting 'To hell with the Bishop!' Well, God will decide that in due time."

The doctor answered quietly: "I fancy it's serious enough to get the police up. I suppose there's a telephone somewhere?"

"No," said the Bishop. "I don't approve of telephones. My predecessors did without them very well."

"That's awkward," remarked the doctor, and I saw that he was pensive.

"If we took shelter in the cathedral . . ." said Caldicott nervously. He did not finish his sentence, but began another. "Their blood is up, my lord. . . ."

It was then that Lady Louisa came into the room. She was very pale and crossed over to her husband.

"There is a gang of roughs outside," she said. "I'm afraid they're angry with you for that sermon. I am a little nervous about you, my dear."

In the hour of danger her loyalty had returned. She had forgotten his hardness, it seemed, and remembered perhaps the love of early years.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips, and I was rather touched.

At that moment a stone crashed through one of the diamond panes of the oriel window, struck a vase on the mantelpiece, and clattered into the great fireplace.

The shouting outside was clearer now, with that hole in the window.

"Down with the Bishop!"

"Boys!" said the young doctor. "Shrill-voiced boys. Not miners, I'll bet."

"This is terrible!" whispered Caldicott hoarsely, and without any pride or pluck shrank back against them all beyond the angle of the window, and, as it happened, behind Lady Louisa. She noticed the cowardice of the man, and I heard the withering contempt of her words.

"Do not take shelter behind me, Mr. Caldicott. If you are afraid, go downstairs and join the servants."

"A tragedy," Frank Hardy had told me, commenting on

the relations between this lady and that man. Well, whatever the secret of it—and I could only guess—it was over now.

Then Nancy came into the room. She was in her dressing-gown with her hair untidy, startled but unafraid.

"Father!" she said, "what is all this strange noise?"

"I will speak to them," said the Bishop. "Open the windows, doctor and turn up the lights so that they can see me."

The doctor looked at him doubtfully.

"I don't think I should. It's very brave of you, my lord, but——"

"I am master in this house," said the Bishop. "Turn up the lights."

"What do you think?" asked the doctor, looking at me.

"I hardly think so," I answered.

"They won't hurt father!" said Nancy, with a kind of childish confidence in her father's power over all things but herself.

The Bishop turned to Caldicott, his secretary, trained to obedience, subservient, afraid of him.

"Caldicott, I command you. Draw back the curtains. Turn up the lights. Open the big window, so that I can talk to these men."

It was an extraordinary thing that the old instinct of obedience, years of discipline under that stern taskmaster, were still strong enough to prevail over physical fear. Although he was really terror-stricken, and trembled visibly, he turned on the electric light—the only touch of modernity in this old palace—so that the room was brilliantly illuminated, and then pulled back the heavy curtains. For a moment he hesitated and took a pace back; then very quickly he undid a wrought-iron catch and pulled the long window open, taking cover as he did so behind the angle of the wall.

A roar of derision and fury—not pleasant to hear, and horribly reminiscent of revolutionary drama—rose from the mob of disorderly youth in that courtyard outside when the Bishop stood squarely in the window-space and called out to them.

"What do you want, my lads? What can I do for you?"

"To hell with the Bishop!" came the answer, mingled with laughter and groans.

"What do you mean by preaching against the miners?" screamed a voice, which was certainly a woman's.

"He doesn't like our morals!" shouted a young lout, and there was an outburst of hoarse laughter.

"Let him look after his own confounded morals. Yes, and the morals of his wife and daughter! Old hypocrite! What's he done for us, anyhow? Ugh!"

The single voices were swallowed up again in a general hullabaloo.

The Bishop was making a speech. It may have been a very good one, but I did not hear a word of it, and certainly none of that crowd heard. I could see some of them now. Two or three of them were carrying torches, and the ruddy light glowed here and there on their faces and figures. No, there were not many miners among them. These were mostly hooligan boys, with a few women and girls. Perhaps they were some of those women who had sat behind me in the cathedral that morning, roused to fury by the attack on their men in that sermon—that fatal sermon—which had sent Jocelyn out of the church in a blind rage, and Nancy after him, to London.

No other stone was flung. There was no direct attack on the Bishop or his palace. In another ten minutes, as though at some signal, the crowd streamed away across the courtyard and through the archway beyond. Five minutes later there was only a distant murmur again, and then silence.

"All is well," said the Bishop calmly. "Folly returns to its lair. The spirit prevails over brute force."

XXI

WHEN I think of this group of young people in post-war England, with whom I happen to have come in close contact by relationship or sympathy, it seems to me that they explain many things which seem perplexing and distressing to those of us of middle age who belong to the old tradition and find it hard to reconcile ourselves to the spiritual anarchy and lawlessness of this younger crowd. At least those young friends of mine, whom I have not selected with any novelist's art, but just as their lives have touched mine now and then, and as I have watched them with anxious and sometimes very troubled eyes, are certainly typical of their age and class in recent history, not only in England, perhaps, but in many countries. In thousands of English homes, I imagine—indeed, I am sure—there has been this clash of ideas between parents and children, this tug of war between two different cones of character and conduct, this claim to absolute liberty by youth resisting and ridiculing all restraint or authority on the part of those to whom, in an older code, they owed obedience and duty. Those two words—obedience and duty—are sufficient in themselves to show how the old bridges have broken down. They do not enter into the language or mentality of this post-war generation. Lettice laughed at them very merrily when I ventured to use them one day in her presence.

"My dear uncle," she said, "how delightfully old-fashioned you are! It's like listening to Norman French. Was there ever a time when girls of my age were obedient and dutiful to their papas and mammas? I can hardly believe it. Mother sometimes tries to persuade me—seldom with success—but it would never enter her head to ask me to obey. I certainly shouldn't if she did. I am mistress of my own little soul, to say nothing of my amusing little body. 'Duty'—good heavens,

what does that mean? I must look it up in the dictionary."

She was mocking me, of course, and yet beneath her mockery was this utter denial of authority or any right of coercion over her way of life by any human being. It was the same with Jocelyn, in revolt against his father. It never occurred to him that he owed obedience and respect to his father, even if he disagreed with him. On the contrary, he was filled with a blind rage because his father demanded obedience and tried to enforce discipline. There was something more than a personal revolt in Jocelyn's anger. It was as though he stood for the spirit of his own generation, outraged by an attempt to thrust him back into the servitude of a past epoch. When he strode out of that Bishop's palace, leaving that terrible letter for his father, he was reversing the old plot of history. It was not the father who cast out a rebellious son. It was a son casting off an old-fashioned father who seemed to him wicked in intolerance. It was post-war youth at war with old age, which they held responsible for all their troubles and the ruin of the world—unconsciously, of course, but instinctively. So also with Mervyn, that brilliant nephew of mine. He ridiculed his father. He "cheeked" him. He listened to his dull speeches—and they were very dull!—with a smiling contempt and satire. They seemed to him ridiculous and meaningless, full of stale old platitudes which had no relation to the actualities of life. There was a broken bridge again between the mentality and moral code of this father and son. They spoke a different language—"Norman French," as Lettice said. Southlands—my brother-in-law—who had made a fortune out of shipbuilding by hard work, was traditional in his sentiment, in his hatred of lounging and light pleasure, in his respect for womanhood, in his religious convictions, in his political prejudices—conservative and imperial—whereas Mervyn put all that into the scrap heap of worn-out things. He had no use for sentimentality, being cynical and flippant, at least in speech, hiding and masking any sentiment that may have lurked in his mind. He made a pose of laziness, and pretended that night clubs and dancing-halls held his ideal of life's entertainment and adventure. He had no respect for womankind in the old-fashioned sense.

"Why should I?" he asked me once, blandly. "The modern girl doesn't ask for respect, and doesn't need it. She's no more virtuous than men, and doesn't want to be. Why should she? She isn't a weak, frail thing that has to be defended by chivalry and mystical reverence. She whacks us at golf and tennis. She knows everything about life which is good or bad to know. She has more physical strength than any of her brothers—they weaken at night long before she's ready to go home—and she's perfectly able to look after herself in any situation of life, from Bond Street to Bechuanaland. My father talks like a novel by Jane Austen. Respect? Good lord! women of to-day would regard it as an insult. And quite right too."

"My dear lad," I said, "you shock me to the marrow bones. I'm afraid this world of ours is doomed."

"The old world is doomed and damned," he answered carelessly. "We've got on to a new plane of civilisation, much better than the last—and less hypocritical. I'd advise you to jump on to the moving stairway before you get left behind with my father and the old crowd."

I was never certain—I'm not certain yet—whether the young people were sincere in the things they said. Nothing pleased them better than to pull the leg of an old-fashioned fellow. Part of their flippancy I think was verbal, and just a game which tickled their sense of humour. And yet their actions coincided with their speech. They carried out their own philosophy of independence and revolt. Young anarchy was out to smash up the old code.

It was not the spirit of one class, but of all classes. I saw exactly the same spirit in Elizabeth's club for working men. Those youths of Walworth were less flippant than the Jocelyns and Mervyns, took themselves more seriously, argued with greater bitterness and a narrow class consciousness, but they too repudiated such words as obedience and discipline. They had no reverence for age in their own homes or in the abstract. They had an instinctive, and even intellectual, belief that old age had made a mess of the world—Elizabeth agreed with them—and they jeered at authority and experience just as Mervyn did, though with a more dangerous desire to break

with the past. Those young people of the slums and mean streets were just as scornful of their parents as Lettice and her class. They, too, as I saw in Elizabeth's club, revolted against the restraints of home life—with more reason because of bad housing conditions, shocking overcrowding—and frequented "movies" and dancing-halls with girls of their own class, just as Mervyn and Lettice went to expensive night clubs and smart restaurants. Young anarchy was not confined to one social sphere. It was in all strata of English life in these post-war years. And I see more and more clearly that it was the war itself which was the cause of all this. It brought down more than crowns and kingdoms. It killed more than the millions of dead. It smashed something in the minds of men—age-old traditions of thought, the foundations of faith, many hopes and illusions in the soul of humanity, the ancient discipline of social life. Its heritage of misery and ruin left a cynicism which has been bequeathed to the very children of the years that followed. I think my sister Helen was right when she said that the parents of war-time relaxed all authority in order to keep its tragedy away from their little ones. The pursuit of pleasure became a national creed, to escape the shadow of those dark days. Children born in war-time, or in their nurseries when their elder brothers were fighting, were allowed all liberty, because childhood was so precious when youth was being slaughtered, so that nothing was denied them. But beyond all the spiritual and economic consequences of war, I believe that this post-war youth was born, literally and truly, into the beginning of a new epoch, with a new mentality. They seemed to have jumped several generations as though evolution were in a hurry. We of the older generation cannot catch them up or hold them back. They have escaped from us.

XXII

AFTER that painful week-end up at Burpham, Jocelyn took refuge with his aunt for awhile, and I saw something of him at that time and heard more about him from Elizabeth, who was delighted to have his company and gave him all her sympathy—too much, perhaps—in his revolt against parental intolerance.

It seems that he had parted with Frank Hardy at the railway station, after their arrival in London, and had taken a taxi straight to Elizabeth's house in Rutland Gate, where he arrived without luggage and with no money for his cab fare. Elizabeth kissed her nephew on the forehead, paid off the taxi-driver, rang the bell for dinner to be served, and said: "Now, my dear, tell me all about it . . . and what are you going to do about pyjamas?"

"Pyjamas don't matter," said Jocelyn. "The point is, aunt, what am I going to do with my bright young life?"

He gave rather a humorous account of recent domestic history, and said that he had quarrelled with his father—"and everything the Governor stands for"—hopelessly and beyond compromise. He supposed that he would have to see about earning his living, but gravely doubted whether he could find any opening suited to his particular type of genius.

Elizabeth saw that beneath his airy way of speech the boy was moody and unhappy. That open breach with his father had hurt him more than he pretended, and once or twice he spoke with a bitterness that revealed passionate resentment against his father's harshness. That scene when the footmen had laid hands on him had left a raw wound in his mind.

"No hurry about money matters," said Elizabeth. "There's always a spare room for you in this house of mine, and board and lodging while you have a look round."

Jocelyn informed her that she was a perfect aunt.

"We might have a look at life together," said Elizabeth, in her comradely way. "You can take me to some of your haunts of vice—we'll do a fox-trot now and then, if you're not too proud to dance with a withered virgin—and I'll take you to my working-men's club and night refuge, and show you the raw material of social evolution. You may be inclined to lend me a hand with my League of Youth. I'm still keen on that idea."

Jocelyn was not keen on it. He hinted tactfully but firmly that he was willing to oblige her in anything but that.

"A queer, dear boy," she told me one evening when I went round to see her. "I can't make him out altogether, though we have great talks, before bed-time. He's restless in his mind, and very moody sometimes, and rather too bitter, for his age. And yet he's perfectly sweet to his poor old aunt, and we have a wonderfully good time together."

That good time included a round of the theatres, followed by dances at the Black Cat Club and other haunts of the Glad Young Things, where sometimes they were joined by Lettice and Mervyn and other members of that irresponsible set.

"Rather amusing," said Elizabeth, "and, as far as I can make out, perfectly respectable, barring a clique of rather decadent young people with whom our little crowd has nothing to do. Of course, it's all rather futile—fiddling while Rome burns and all that—and I only go there as an observer of youth. I'm worming my way into the confidence of these young people. One of these days I'm going to catch hold of them and inspire them with some spiritual purpose. It's what they're waiting for. It's lack of any clear and definite purpose in life that makes them so restless and flippant."

"Elizabeth," I said, "you're making excuses for sin. You know you thoroughly enjoy yourself prancing round polished floors with crinkly-haired boys."

"It's a healthy exercise," said Elizabeth calmly. "It keeps me from getting fat and frousty. The curious thing is that Jocelyn is the first to get bored. The other night, just as I was beginning to warm up to a jazz band with its wonderful rhythm, I found Jocelyn staring at me in a moody way out of those steel-blue eyes of his which remind me alarmingly at

times of that ecclesiastical brother of mine. 'Isn't this rather rot?' he asked. 'Haven't we enjoyed ourselves enough, Aunt Elizabeth? What about bed? . . . I felt rebuked.'

"Very sensible of him," I remarked. "But I suspect a sex-complex, or something of the kind."

"Ah!" said Elizabeth. "I think you've hit the right nail on the head. That niece of yours is tormenting the poor boy with her laughing cruelty. She ought to be spanked."

It appeared that Jocelyn had confided in his aunt about Lettice. She had led him on to believe that she liked him very much. Down at Southlands she had let him kiss her pretty often—"asked for it, I'll be bound!" said Elizabeth. Now she treated him like a child, and went about with men twice her age—ex-officers who were very much taken with this post-war girl, and lately with young Tremayne, that languid young gentleman we had met in Jocelyn's rooms at Oxford who had talked such nonsense about getting on the dole. He was now running a garage at the back of the Brompton Road, and drove Lettice about in racing-cars and second-hand Rolls-Royces which he was trying to sell on commission. His father, who was a penniless peer—he had lost all his property in Ireland—touted for him among his club friends. Young Tremayne lived over the garage, in a mews, and Lettice took tea with him there and helped him to hang his pictures, and introduced some of her rich friends as prospective customers. Jocelyn hadn't a look-in at the moment, especially as he hadn't a penny in the world of his own, except what his aunt allowed him to draw on her account.

"And how much is that?" I asked.

Elizabeth laughed humorously.

"These young people have no idea of money. Jocelyn just orders what he likes, and it's always the best—unerringly. He thinks he's very economical because he takes taxis everywhere instead of running a car of his own. That two-seater of his had to be sold to pay some bills in Oxford."

"What's his idea of a career?" I asked. "Isn't it about time he tried to be something?"

"I think he's found something," said Elizabeth. "I'm not sure that you'll approve of it."

She roused my curiosity by this preliminary warning of a shock to come.

"Tell me the worst!" I said.

Elizabeth announced an amazing fact.

"He has been nominated as Labour candidate for Burpham. I'm backing his expenses. He has a great career in front of him. Youth leaps into the saddle at last."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

It seemed to me ridiculous that a boy of twenty-two, just down from Oxford, should have the impudence to stand for Parliament. What did he know about life or any of its problems? What did he know about the economic conditions of England, or the world?

"Why stand for Labour?" I asked—"against his own code and caste, under the influence of men who would betray their country for class interests, or lead it to ruin for some theoretical ideal of equality and liberty? Not even for equality, but a 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' a tyranny of ignorance over intelligence, a despotism of ill-educated and unbalanced minds, filled with class-hatred and cruelty."

All my conservative tradition—which sometimes even now overmastered my liberal convictions—my tolerance of other points of view, my rôle as an observer and onlooker of the political world, surged up at the thought of this boy putting up as a Labour candidate with his aunt's money to finance his folly.

Elizabeth and I had a quarrel about it. Or rather, I quarrelled and she laughed at me, and was stubborn in her belief that it would give Jocelyn a fine chance of doing something for England and the younger crowd.

"It's not my doing, anyhow," she said, "though I thoroughly approve. It's that young man David Swayne. Jocelyn has been seeing a lot of him lately."

"That young Bolshevik!" I exclaimed bitterly, and, as I now know, unfairly.

"Not a Bolshevik at all!" said Elizabeth rather warmly. "A most admirable young man who is going to help me with my working-men's club. He has a very good influence over Jocelyn—a moderating influence, though you will be surprised to hear it."

"My dear Elizabeth," I said, "you ought to be put in prison as a dangerous lady—the Madame Roland of English Revolution. These people are taking advantage of your kind heart. It's your money they want—and Jocelyn's name. The son of the Bishop of Burpham! A great advertisement for them. The son of the only man in England who dares to tell the straight and unpleasant truth to the people."

She tapped my hand and said, "You're a hypocrite! You know you were shocked by my brother's intolerance. You know you wouldn't have spent another day in that old palace of his for all the money on earth. You told me so."

"Yes," I admitted, "that's true. But honestly, Elizabeth, I'm afraid of your Labour crowd. Some of them are moderate and patriotic men, but they're horribly mixed up with anarchists and foreign propagandists. I hate to think of Jocelyn exploited by them. He's just the type to go to extremes for the adventure of the game. Besides, I can't believe he's serious. He's too flippant and humorous."

"He's bitter," said Elizabeth darkly. "His father shocked him by such harshness; and he has something of his father in him, the same passion of conviction—on the other side. I've been watching the boy like an anxious mother. Sometimes I've heard him pacing up and down his room at night, thinking things out, trying to get at the meaning and purpose of life, in travail of soul, with growing-pains. He hides himself under a laughing mask. That affair with Lettice has hurt him rather badly. Something happened the other night which I haven't told you."

She told me then, and I listened gloomily.

It appeared that Jocelyn went with his aunt and Lettice to the Black Cat Club. Lettice had come up to town with Mervyn, and they were spending the night at the Hyde Park Hotel. Jocelyn danced with her several times, and Elizabeth saw that they were arguing about something, though when he led her back he sat silent and moody. Lettice was in her gayest mood and looked exquisite as usual, in a low-cut frock which showed her white shoulders rising like a lily from a green sheath. She chaffed Jocelyn and twitted him for his glum looks. Once she suggested that little boys ought not

to stay up so late, especially if they had got out of bed the wrong way. Then Tremayne came in. It was quite clear from the way he searched the room that he expected to find Lettice there, though she pretended that she had come up quite unexpectedly on the spur of the moment. He came across the room to her in his languid, elegant, unself-conscious way, and when she held out her hand, raised it to his lips.

"It's a thousand years since I've seen you," he drawled.

"Three days," said Lettice.

"True! More than a thousand years. Three thousand."

He turned to Jocelyn with a friendly nod.

"Hullo, Pomeroy. I didn't expect to see you here to-night. Lettice said you had an engagement with the lower classes."

Jocelyn lit a cigarette before he answered.

"A disagreeable surprise for both of you," he said, in a low voice which had a quiver of passion in it.

"Oh, we're always glad to see you, Jocelyn," said Lettice graciously, but with a mockery which was intended to hurt, and did hurt.

Tremayne danced with her, and Jocelyn watched them, slant-eyed, though he pretended to be interested in Mervyn's account of a polo match at Hurlingham. When Lettice came back to their table she complained of the stuffy room and a slight headache.

"Ivo is going to take me for a drive," she announced. "Fresh air is what my little soul most craves. I must breathe or die."

"Good idea," said Jocelyn. "I'll come with you."

He stood up from the table and looked at her in a challenging way.

She smiled at him.

"I'm afraid not, dear Jocelyn. Ivo's car is a two-seater. Ivo and I just fit in."

"In that case," said Jocelyn, "Tremayne will stay here and talk to Aunt Elizabeth, and I will drive you in his car, which I am quite sure he will be pleased to lend us, considering certain little bills I signed for him at Oxford. . . . Where shall we go? Hampstead way or Wimbledon?"

"Ivo is driving me," said Lettice. "Good night, dear people. Come along, Ivo!"

She smiled, and turned and laid her hand on Tremayne's arm.

"No," said Jocelyn. "I'm damned if you will. It's not playing the game. When I had a two-seater at Oxford you came driving with me. You used me as your chauffeur—and said the world belonged to you and me. Tremayne can go to hell. . . . I'm driving you."

He spoke very quietly, but every word he said was heard by Elizabeth, who felt sorry for him, and very much distressed. Other young people in the club were watching this little scene, and Tremayne looked faintly amused, with raised eyebrows, as though surprised and shocked by Jocelyn's bad manners.

"My dear Jocelyn," said Lettice, very coldly, "when you stop sponging on your aunt and have a car of your own, and learn to behave like a little gentleman, I shall be delighted to drive with you—if I happen to want a lift or to do a little shopping. . . . Ivo, I'm waiting."

Tremayne hesitated, looked at Jocelyn in a whimsical way, said "Sorry, old man!" and strode after Lettice, who was already half way across the polished floor.

Elizabeth told me that she tried to relieve the situation by suggesting supper, but Jocelyn said he was sick of the whole show.

"Lettice," said Mervyn with brotherly candour, "belongs to the feline type. Beautiful, but cruel. Have a drink, Jocelyn?"

"Damn drinks, and damn everything!" said Jocelyn fiercely.

That night he paced up and down his room again, and Elizabeth heard him. She put on her dressing-gown and went upstairs—it was three in the morning—and tapped at his door.

It was a moment or two before he answered, and then opened the door and said, "Hullo, aunt!"

His face was white and drawn as he stood there in his dressing-gown with a cigarette between his fingers—he smoked too many.

Elizabeth drew him close to her and kissed his forehead.

"You're worrying about that little slut," she said. "She isn't worth it, my dear. Forget her, and get on with life. Perhaps later she'll come back to you—if you want her—one day."

"I want her now," he said. "We're meant for each other."

Elizabeth tried to chaff him out of this morbid mood, but couldn't get a smile from him.

He cursed Tremayne, who had been his best friend at Oxford, and now betrayed him, he said. He also inveighed against night clubs and dancing and "the whole poisonous show," with a harsh disapproval of the life and habits of the Glad Young Things, which reminded Elizabeth in an amazing way of her brother the Bishop. This boy who had been a rebel against intolerance was now himself a passionate critic of this liberty which Lettice and her like had claimed and gained.

"It makes my blood curdle," he said, "when I think of her driving about the country at night with that blackguard Tremayne. Of course he'll arrange a breakdown, and they'll camp out on some lonely heath, and then he'll talk that filthy sentiment which used to revolt me at Oxford. He can pour it out by the yard."

"Is that what happens?" asked Elizabeth, rather shocked for once. "Prearranged breakdowns, lonely heaths, and all that? Is that why you and Lettice came to breakfast one morning at Sutton Courtney before I finished my beauty sleep?"

Jocelyn admitted that something of the sort had happened; but then, as he explained, that was a different thing altogether. He wasn't Tremayne, thank God. Besides, he and Lettice were properly in love with other. Or he had been ass enough to think so. Now she had barged off and jeered at him because he was getting in with Labour, and accused him of sponging on his aunt to avoid doing an honest job of work. She said he was becoming a traitor to his own crowd and a Bolshie of the reddest dye.

Elizabeth abused the girl. Never again would she allow the lady Lettice to cross her threshold.

For the first time Jocelyn permitted himself a faint smile.

"There's some truth in what she says," he admitted. "I mean that bit about sponging on you. I shan't feel honest until I'm able to pay for board and lodging. David says he can get me a job as secretary to one of the Labour leaders. That man Herbert Bradshaw who runs the Miners' Union."

"A most remarkable man!" said Elizabeth. "He strews his

'h's' on the floor, but his soul rises over the chimney pots. One of these days he'll be a power in the land."

Jocelyn laughed in an enigmatical way, and then said something which rather perturbed his aunt.

"I'm not sure that these Labour Johnnies are any more honest than the 'blasted capitalists,' as they call them. They'll play their own hands and feather their own nests if ever they get the chance. They're out for power, like all the rest. And some of them talk the most undiluted nonsense—enough to make a cat sick. David is the only honest soul among them, as far as I've met them."

"But, my dear Jocelyn," exclaimed Elizabeth, "you mustn't go in for politics if you don't believe in your own side! I want you to be sincere—at all costs. It's the great curse of this country—the insincerity of party politicians."

"Oh, I'll play the game," he said. "It ought to be uncommonly amusing. Now that Lettice has chucked me, I may as well get interested in any kind of bunk that offers itself. Labour—social revolution—Red stuff—anything to keep one's mind busy on things that don't matter."

He was terribly bitter again, said Elizabeth. Frightfully flippant. Lettice and his thwarted love tormented him and took the boyishness out of his heart. This cynicism was only the defence of youth against life's cruelties, she said, with an understanding heart which made her so wise in many ways, so unwise and so weak when people took advantage of her good nature and exploited her generosity.

XXIII

FRANK HARDY disappeared for a time after his dismissal by the Bishop, and, as I know now, he was deliberately keeping his address from me. I think he hated the idea of cadging from me, owing to his fixed idea that he had let me down by losing his job for which I had recommended him. There was another reason, which I found out when I met him in the street one day in the neighbourhood of Harrod's.

He was walking ahead of me at a good steady pace through a procession of young girls doing their shopping in the Brompton Road, or flitting past the shop windows with sideway glances at the wax models, who were ludicrous caricatures of themselves. One or two of them looked back at that fine soldierly figure, but he had no eyes for them and stared straight ahead, unaware of all these tall young houris in knee-short frocks, with bare arms and bobbed hair, who were attracted by his good looks. It was only when he halted for a moment and turned to fumble in his trousers' pocket for a coin to put in the box of a blind man on the kerb-stone that I was quite sure of him. He was rather shabby again, though neat and well-brushed, but he hadn't got back to that haggard look which I had seen that time when I met him in Whitehall on Armistice Day before he went to Elizabeth's lodging-house.

"Hullo, Frank!" I said. "Glad to see you distributing largesse like a lord."

He answered as though we had met the day before.

"Blinded on the Somme," he said, glancing at the object of his charity—a young man standing rigidly, listening to the footsteps of all those passing girls and to the honk of taxi-cabs and the noise of the unseen world about him. "When I see fellows like that I feel what a swine I am to quarrel with life and luck."

"Why have you been in hiding from your friends?" I asked.

He made an evasive answer, and looked slightly embarrassed.

"You've your own work to do," he said. "You can't spend your time getting jobs for unemployed inefficients."

"Still unemployed?" I asked.

He relieved me by saying that he was working fairly hard and doing rather well. But when I cross-questioned him, he admitted that it was rather sweated labour, and took him nine hours a day to earn nine shillings in that length of time.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, distressed by this statement. "What scoundrel pays you at that rate? Why, the dustmen earn more than that, to say nothing of Covent Garden porters or dock labourers."

"Oh, lord, yes," said Frank with a cheery laugh. "But then they're the aristocrats of labour. I can't compete with men like that. As a matter of fact, I address envelopes at a shilling a thousand for an advertising agency. Mostly circulars for patent medicines. Rather amusing, really. I make up stories about some of the fantastic names I come across. You wouldn't believe some of them."

Winchester and Oxford. Was this the result of our public-school education and our University careers? Addressing envelopes at a shilling a thousand! After commanding a company in a war that had saved the world, as we used to think. An officer and a gentleman, a man of honour and clean life, a fine product of our quality in blood and character—surely to goodness there was something better for a man like that!

"Where are you living?" I asked.

He hedged over his address, and pointed vaguely across the Brompton Road.

"Behind there. Bed-sitting-room for single gentlemen. You know the sort of thing. Not too bad, but rather expensive for my present means."

"Take me home with you," I said. "I'll smoke a pipe in your room. I'm not going to let you escape from me this time until I find you again in a night refuge."

He laughed, and made excuses for getting rid of me—pretending that his room was in a mess, and that anyhow it was hardly big enough to smoke a pipe in with any comfort.

"Look here," I said grimly, "I'm going to find out where

you live, old lad. What's your objection? Any dark secret?"

He coloured up and said "None whatever!" and struck across the Brompton Road, leading me through an old archway with a picture shop at the corner.

We came into an alley way, with a rag and bone merchant's yard and a shoeing forge and some lock-up garages. I knew the place well, having cut through it many a time with a wire-haired terrier, to avoid the traffic of Knightsbridge and the Brompton Road.

"Raphael Street," I said, and Frank nodded and laughed again.

"Yes. Single room to let. Very handy for poor but respectable gentlemen like myself, with a week's rent in advance. Single ladies not taken without luggage and references. Very good address for out-of-work actors or lady typists. Raphael Street, Knightsbridge, S.W. Almost as good as Rutland Gate, if you don't happen to have seen the cards in the windows."

"I know a restaurant at the corner," I said. "A cut off the joint and two veges. Sixpence before the war."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Frank, with astonishment and envy. "One and twopence now. It's frequented by all the beggars of the Brompton Road. Blind men, musicians on one-string fiddles, ex-service men without arms and legs—the heroes of the Great War, who live on public charity, and do rather well, poor devils. I've chummed up to some of them. One hears amazing stories. . . . One fellow was good enough to suggest that I should make a success with a collecting-box while he plays the cornet. He thinks the ladies would like my refined appearance."

"They would," I agreed.

It was in his room on the third floor of a little lodging-house with a stucco front from which the plaster had mostly peeled that I found out Frank's real reason for keeping his address from good friends. On his mantelpiece, propped up against an empty tobacco tin, was a portrait of Nancy Pomeroy. Beneath it, placed so that he could see this photograph as he worked, was his writing-table, littered with addressed envelopes and piles of others unaddressed, and pages torn from some directory. In the corner of the room was an iron bedstead with

a grubby counterpane, and in another corner a deal washstand with the usual jug and basin chipped by careless lodgers. On one wall was a text—"Blessed be the Meek"—and on the other, nearest to the door, a coloured portrait of Lord Roberts meeting General Buller—reminder of forgotten history which once excited England.

"A comfortable little den," said Frank cheerfully.

He stood with his back to the fireplace, as though to hide the portrait of Nancy so conspicuously placed on that mantelshelf, and asked me to take the only good chair he had.

"Have you heard from Nancy lately?" I asked, with deliberate tactlessness.

For a moment he hesitated, avoiding my eyes.

Then he answered casually:

"Yes. . . . Quite often, as a matter of fact. She sends my letters to a barber's shop."

"Why not here?" I asked.

He was silent again for a moment, and then his eyes looked into mine, squarely.

"I want to play the game. I'd rather she didn't know where I'm living. She wants to come to me . . . to share this sort of thing. Not to be thought of, you know."

I saw his eyes rove round that squalid room of his, as though seeing it for the first time, as though disapproving of it as a home for Nancy.

"No," I agreed. "Hardly possible, Frank."

"Utterly impossible. One doesn't drag down a girl like that. An innocent child who has never known the curse of poverty."

We talked for half an hour—rather gloomily—about the state of England and all the unemployment about, and the turmoil in Europe, which at that time did not look good for world peace or any quick return to prosperous times. It seems to me characteristic of Frank's unselfishness that he was more worried about all this than about his own private life in a bed-sitting-room with piles of unaddressed envelopes for his daily toil, and nine shillings at the end of it.

"It's the younger crowd I'm thinking of," he said. "Sometimes I take a stroll through Kensington Gardens to get a

breezer, and when I see the kiddies playing there with their nursemaids—the very same games that I used to play under the same old trees—I get a kind of shiver down my spine, when I think that we may be drifting to another war which will drive our lads to the shambles again. Most of those kids I used to play with were the first lieutenants who got into the lists of killed and wounded. Do you think it's going to happen again when those babies are old enough to play with machine guns and tanks instead of bows and arrows and toy trains?"

"We've got to stop that next war," I said. "It's up to fellows like you, Frank. The victims of the last. You must hand on your knowledge to the younger generation. The memory of the things you saw and suffered, and the price of it all, and the social misery that rewards the fighting men when their job is done—so many of them."

Frank shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"What can I do from a bed-sitting-room in Raphael Street?"

We were silent for a while, and then Frank tapped out the ashes of his pipe against the fireplace and asked a question which I could not answer.

"Do you think we have lost our character and quality? . . . Sometimes, when I go about London, and look at the faces that pass, I seem to think we're not the same people as we used to be. Those boys and girls in Knightsbridge, and their under-dressed mamas—do they care a damn about anything except jazz and the jam of life? I get depressed when I think of the fellows who died in heaps to make a better kind of a world—my old pals. This new world doesn't seem on the right road. The morning papers give me the pip. Nothing but class conflict, industrial disputes, international bickering, and political humbug. It seems to me that poor old England is rotting up."

"You talk like the Bishop of Burham!" I said.

Frank gave a quiet laugh.

"Yes. Sometimes I find myself agreeing with his point of view. Queer, that! In spite of his intolerance, the old man has a hawk's eye for truth. I've been seeing something of our intellectual revolutionaries, our little Red. There's a nest of them in this house. Or rather, they come here to see one of

their leading propagandists. A young neurotic who used to be a Conscientious Objector in the war."

"Oh, lord," I groaned.

"Well, I don't blame him too much for that," said Frank. "I'm going to be a 'conchie' myself in the next war. . . . This laddie lives here with his sister Ruth—their name is Windle—and they write the gospel of Karl Marx in little pamphlets, which are printed privately and circulated in factories and workshops. They're very civil to me, and have an eye to my conversion. They push their blasted little leaflets under the crack of my door."

"These fanatics have no importance," I said. "They're an insignificant minority."

Frank wasn't quite so sure of that, though he used to think so, he confessed.

"They're pretty active," he told me. "They have a missionary zeal. You never saw such a queer collection of people as line up here in the evenings for debates and committee meetings. Working women with mad eyes, young Russians, city clerks, typist girls, pale-faced youths in the pimply stage, and now and then well-dressed women—from the outer suburbs, I imagine—who have been caught by this gospel of revolt, just as in the old days they were caught up in the suffrage movement. It's a kind of religion, and I believe it's spreading. . . . Oh, blast that woman!"

I saw him looking towards the door, with a kind of rage mingled with amusement, and between the bottom of the door and a strip of ragged linoleum I saw a paper booklet carefully pushed forward until it shot on to the bare boards to the edge of the frayed carpet. Outside the door there was a slight cough, and then the sound of footsteps going downstairs in loose slippers, flippety-flop.

Frank seized a pair of tongs and picked up the pamphlet, and was about to throw it into his fireplace when I held his arm and said, "Give it to me. I'd like to have a look at it."

"It's the most undiluted filth," said Frank. "And it's probably reeking with disease germs from some back room in Whitechapel, with a private printing-press worked by an unwashed alien."

I took the risk, and glanced at the pamphlet. It was entitled "The Curse of Capital, by one of England's Wage Slaves."

I put the thing in my pocket for future study, and then held out my hand to Frank.

"I've been glad of this chat, and I'm making a note of your address. I'm not going to leave you here. There's better work for you than addressing envelopes."

"It's amazingly good of you to think so," said Frank, with that humility which made me like him so much. Of course, if I could earn a decent screw——"

On our way downstairs a young woman passed us. Or rather, we stood aside to let her pass. But she stopped and spoke to Frank, and I caught a glimpse of a thin, pale, and rather attractive-looking face framed in reddish hair, cut short behind, and with a sharp, rat-tailed curl at each side of her high cheekbones. She was dressed in a straight frock of shabby green silk, cut low at the neck, and her arms were bare to the shoulders, though it was early in the afternoon. "The Rossetti type," I thought.

"I've just pushed our latest little book under your door," she said. "Give it to a friend when you've read it, won't you?"

"I shan't read it," said Frank, "and I don't give poison to my friends."

She was not annoyed by his answer, but smiled at him with a kind of pitying amusement.

"One day you'll see the light. It's just blinding when your eyes are opened. Only don't wait too long. When the revolution comes there'll be no mercy for those who were wilfully blind and wouldn't see."

"Thanks for the warning!" said Frank ironically.

"We have a little meeting to-night," said the girl. "All are welcome. Do come and meet some of our leaders. Comrade Martin is going to speak to us—straight from Moscow."

"This staircase is rather narrow," said Frank. "Are you coming up, or shall we go down?"

It was the first time I had ever heard him speak roughly to a woman, but I could see his exasperation. He gave expression to it on the doorstep as he saw me out.

"That female gets on my nerves. I'll have to strangle her if she doesn't keep out of my way."

That evening, curiously enough, I had a letter from Nancy Pomeroy, who wrote to ask me whether I could give her Frank Hardy's address.

"He writes from a barber's shop," she said, "but he isn't living there. If I have to walk through the streets of London calling out his name, I am going to see him, because love gives me the hunting instinct. He can't escape me! . . ."

There was a short postscript which filled me with dejection.

"By separate post I'm sending you that novel of mine. Will you be tremendously generous and cast a critical eye upon my scrawly manuscript? If it's too utterly bad and foolish perhaps you may find it useful as spills to light your pipe. Of course I haven't dared to tell father about it. Last Sunday he preached a sermon about immoral fiction, and I'm sure mine would shock him most frightfully, though it's meant to be amusing."

The parcel arrived next morning, tied up in green silk, and I groaned faintly when I opened it and read its title—"The Foolish Virgin"—in that "scrawly" handwriting to which she had confessed. Hardly a week passed without my receiving similar parcels from young women who had the fond belief that they could write novels and that I had endless time to read their illiterate and emotional nonsense. They seemed to think that it was my sacred duty to encourage their genius and to act as their literary agent. I had a grudge against Nancy for putting this burden upon me, and yet, because of my interest in her and my friendship with the man she loved, I knew that I should have to waste some precious time in deciphering her hieroglyphics—not even typed, the little hussy! I put the story—written in penny exercise-book—on my dressing-table for some wakeful night when I might glance at it.

Before that happened I went round to Elizabeth's and told her about my meeting Frank again, and asked her advice about finding him a better job than addressing envelopes at a shilling a thousand.

"Send him round here," she said. "It's just possible that I can take him on as a sort of secretary, if he'll put up with my

tantrums. I'm going all out on the League of Youth. This country of ours has got to be saved, whether it likes it or not. Otherwise woe will befall us. That remarkable woman Mrs. Sharples——"

Mrs. Sharples was that spiritualist who had prophesied Armageddon and the Second Phase of Tribulation in 1928. I concealed my contempt for this nonsense in gratitude for Elizabeth's warm and generous heart. Five pounds a week, which she proposed to pay Frank Hardy for secretarial work, would be very useful to that young man, though it would not make him rich enough to marry Nancy or even to leave that lodging-house in Raphael Street,

XXIV

I WENT to the first meeting of Elizabeth's League of Youth, publicly inaugurated at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, with my brother-in-law Southlands in the chair, and the Bishop of Burpham on the platform, with an Anglican clergyman, two Catholic priests, and a member of the Labour Party. Elizabeth had, as she said, gone "all out" on this idea, and Frank Hardy had worked like a dog to earn his five pounds a week, but with a real interest in the scheme, which appealed to him strongly, and a profound admiration for Elizabeth Pomeroy, with whom he was on the best of terms.

Elizabeth had regarded it as her crowning triumph in getting her brother to appear on the platform, after a long and at times heated correspondence with him, by which he was finally persuaded that there was to be no subversive propaganda, no socialistic influence, no political bias in this League of Youth, but only an organisation for bringing together the younger generation of all classes in a spirit of service and idealism, for their country's sake, for world peace, industrial conciliation, and a serious study of social problems.

Several times he nearly backed out, after a provisional acceptance.

"I must have a solemn pledge from you, my dear Elizabeth," he wrote, "that young Communists of any kind, avowed or concealed, will be excluded from membership of this League."

Elizabeth dictated a solemn pledge to Frank Hardy, with one mental reservation.

"As long as they conceal their Red instincts," she said to Frank, "that's as far as I can go. I can't look into the minds of men. I wish to heaven I could. I should have saved a lot of money in my time, and some heart aches."

"It must be distinctly understood," wrote the Bishop, "that if I address your meeting I have the right to speak plainly

about the perils that confront our youth, and their need of discipline and religion."

"That wrecks it!" said Elizabeth, when this letter arrived. "If Rupert speaks plainly, as he calls it, he will insult all my young people, and they'll leave us in a body. We had better let him go, though his name would be a tower of strength to us with young men of Conservative ideas. It would utterly dispel all rumours of Bolshevism, which are doing us a lot of harm already."

"Say you rely on his sympathy and tact," suggested Frank. "Ask him to appeal to idealism rather than denounce errors."

Amazingly enough, it was my influence which seemed to turn the scale. At least, there was a phrase in one of the Bishop's letters which alluded to my little speech to him on that night when he had shown me Jocelyn's letter.

"That literary friend of yours," he wrote to Elizabeth, "accused me of intolerance. It is to prove the utter falsity of that charge that I am strongly inclined to attend and speak at your meeting. I am not intolerant with the aspirations of youth. I am only intolerant of those who defy the laws of righteousness and duty. My heart beats in sympathy with noble young manhood like those who laid down their lives for their country's sake when we were hard pressed and gave an example to the younger generation—which, alas, is dreadfully forgetful of that sacrifice."

"Well," said Elizabeth, "that seems fair enough. That brother of mine is broadening a little, thank God! But it's taking a dreadful risk to let him speak, much as I want his name on our Committee. . . . Meanwhile, Jocelyn refuses to meet his father or listen to any speech he may make. So far he hasn't told his father a word about his political plans, and I haven't blabbed. But I feel rather guilty about it."

"I think you ought to tell him," I urged. "There'll be a dreadful row when he finds out, and he'll accuse you of deception."

"It's Jocelyn's affair," said Elizabeth. "He's old enough to take his own line. Anyhow, we'll get the meeting over first. My nerves are really not strong enough to stand a domestic crisis in the middle of this public work."

"You haven't a nerve in your body," I told her, but that was hardly true, as I found on the night of the meeting, when she sat on the platform with a notebook in her hand and an anxious gaze into the body of the hall when the assembly gathered. I could see by her troubled eyes that she was feeling the strain of this inauguration of her great idea.

And yet, as I looked up at her, there on the platform, I was overcome with admiration for this dear lady with whom I had been in love as a young man, who had devoted herself to humanity in all charity, with loving kindness, from the beginning of the war till now, when most of us had slackened all efforts and fallen into cynicism and disillusion and selfishness. Her face was flushed, giving her a touch of her old beauty. She was charming still, in spite of the flecks of grey in her brown hair. Her lips were still humorous with a little lurking smile. In spite of her anxiety and her spiritual emotion, she was a perfect Aunt, as Jocelyn called her, to the younger generation in all classes of this post-war England, from the Walworth Road to Oxford.

Some of those young friends of hers had rallied up. There was a contingent from her working-men's club and another from her night refuge. I caught a glimpse of David Swayne, that Ruskin College man, who came in with a group of earnest young men and women, obviously Labour. They cheered her when she first appeared on the platform, and she blushed like a schoolgirl at this ovation. Tremayne came in with Lettice. That languid young humorist who ran a garage behind Knightsbridge seemed to act as chauffeur to Lettice in a variety of expensive-looking cars which I presumed he had the luck to sell now and then. It was a Vauxhall saloon this time, and I arrived outside the hall just as he was handing Lettice out. She had been dining with him, I suppose, for they were both in evening clothes, hers very charming, of white silk, showing her long white arms and a rope of pearls round her neck.

"Good evening, my dear," I said humbly, as an uncle should. "You look a wonderful object-lesson of social equality and young idealism. It ought to have a spiritual effect on the younger generation from the Walworth Road and White-chapel."

"Charmed to hear you say so, dear uncle!" said this lovely lady. "Beauty is like mercy—it is twice blessed. It blesseth him that gives as well as him that takes. Also she—and her. But aren't we going to be dreadfully bored? I feel it's going to be two hours cruelty to Ivo, poor boy."

"I'll stick it out," said that young man, who was Ivo Tremayne. "Boys of the bull-dog breed, and all that. . . . I've bribed some of the lads of the village to come here to-night to support Miss Pomeroy. By Jove, yes, there's Bickenhall, disguised as a gentleman."

I think Lettice—and Mervyn, who came in late and sat next to me in full evening clothes with a camellia in his buttonhole and an opera hat folded on his knees, vastly amused by this remarkable gathering—must have rallied up some of the Glad Young Things, for Elizabeth's sake. Elegant young creatures with bobbed hair greeted each other with friendly waggles of the fingers, secret signs, and light laughter.

"What's it all about?" asked one of them, speaking to Lettice. "Is it a revival meeting? Shall I have to confess all my little sins in public, or anything like that?"

"The meeting only lasts two hours," said Lettice with a sinister irony which escaped me for the moment.

Youth was there, undoubtedly—those working-class contingents, these friends of Lettice and Mervyn and Ivo Tremayne—but, all told, they were in a small minority. As I watched the people take their seats, I was aware that something had gone wrong with Elizabeth's League of Youth. I saw an amazing collection of bald heads and silvered pates and whiskered chops. I saw rows upon rows of elderly women and ancient dames. I saw withered old gentlemen who sat down on the hard chairs with a careful arrangement of bony knees. I saw an old man, looking like a Hebrew prophet, from whose dim and bleary eyes tears exuded from sheer senility. I saw, not serried ranks of ardent youth but a considerable rendezvous of aged folk, holding crooked palms to their ears to catch the platform oratory. Elizabeth and Frank Hardy had called this public meeting to inaugurate a League of Youth, but apart from a few groups of the younger crowd—Elizabeth's protégés—youth was 'otherwise engaged' as Jocelyn had once re-

marked at Oxford, and it was the older generation which had rallied, emotionally, hopefully, pathetically, to see youth claim its leadership of life and clean up the mess which old age had made.

"God!" said Mervyn, at my side, "did you ever see such a collection of old crocks!"

He laughed quite loudly, and twisted round in his chair to study our senility.

I too saw the comic side of this gathering of the League of Youth. Looking back on it now, I could make it laughable, as I am tempted to do. And yet there was something rather tragic about it, which had an emotional effect upon me and made me angry with my nephew Mervyn, that young scoffer and ironist. These elderly women had, perhaps, lost their sons in the war. These old men had come with a wistful desire to give youth a chance, worried, as all of us were, by the lack of purpose in the nation, the flippancy and frivolity of post-war England. Elizabeth's appeal, the preliminary manifesto which she had published in the newspapers, had aroused a new hopefulness, and struck a sympathetic chord in many hearts as warm as her own but disconcerted by the anarchy of youth. They had come to clap hands at the new leaders, the ardent youngsters, and looking round they saw, not fiery youth but tired old age—themselves, with dim eyes and silvered hair.

I don't think the people on the platform realised this character of the audience. Probably they saw only a blur of faces and those young people in the front rows. Elizabeth in her preliminary statement spoke as though all who listened to her were on the threshold of life. She was very nervous—though I had accused her of being without nerves—and her notes trembled in her hands. I could hear the quiver in her voice when she first began to speak, after my brother-in-law, Southlands, had called upon her to give a general outline of the ideals and objects of the League of which he had consented to be president.

But then she warmed up, and I listened to the rich tones of her voice, as, with deep emotion, she called upon youth to come forward and take up the standard of service and sacrifice which had been held high by their fathers and their brothers

—who had fought in the Great War and bequeathed a noble tradition to the younger crowd. For a moment or two she spoke bitterly of the great failure of peace, and the dreadful danger which still lurked in Europe, but then she put all that on one side and in her gracious jolly way spoke of post-war youth and its splendid qualities of fearlessness and adventure and spirit of liberty.

There was some applause from the front seats where the Glad Young Things represented this post-war class, and I saw Lettice clapping her hands while Tremayne at her side called out "Heah! heah!" with great enthusiasm, so that his monocle dropped from his left eye for the moment.

"I am not one of those," said Elizabeth, "who feel despondent about our young men and women. On the contrary, I believe that they are wonderfully in advance of my generation, both in courage and character. When I see our girls striding out like young Dianas, free-limbed, free-souled, I have no pessimism about the future of England. They will make good mothers of men. In any peril that confronts us they will show the old courage of their race. They are unafraid, ready for all adventure. What they need, what their brothers need, is a little leadership, a little self-discipline, perhaps—above all a spiritual purpose, and a community of comradeship. That is the object of this League of Youth, to create a comradeship between the younger generation of all classes and of all nations, to destroy snobbishness, which is the curse of this country, and to recruit the young men and women of to-day so that they may be the leaders of to-morrow, inspired by love of country without hatred of others, love of God without distinction of creed, love of humanity without class conflict. We old people have made a frightful mess of things, my dears. It is up to you youngsters to lead us all out of the Slough of Despond by your fresh vision and untrammelled feet."

Again great applause broke out. Lettice whispered to Tremayne and laughed. Mervyn turned to me and winked in a humorous, ironical way. From the back of the hall some of the young men and women from Walworth chorused their approval in Cockney shouts. The old people sitting close to me were moved to tears. A sad-eyed woman sitting on my right

hand touched my arm and said, "My boy died in the war. I'd like him to be here to-night . . . to take a hand in this."

"Perhaps he is here," I said, and she looked at me in a startled way and then said, "Yes . . . it's nice to think so."

On the platform the Bishop, sitting with his gaitered legs crossed, fidgeted with his silk apron. Once or twice his handsome, ascetic face turned towards his sister with a faint smile about his thin lips. Once, for just a second, he shook his head as though in disagreement with her words. It was when she spoke of the girls of England, free-limbed and free-souled, and said she had no pessimism about the future.

Southlands followed Elizabeth—not hearing Mervyn's groan of filial impatience with his humming and hawing, and his broken sentences and frightful platitudes.

"We have just heard," he said, "er—we have just listened to—er—a most eloquent—I say, a most moving address, from this—er—very excellent lady—er—Miss Pomeroy. We all know—er—some of us have been very much distressed—I may say—our anxiety is great—er—about the present state of this great country of ours—er—this remarkable Empire—upon which, as we all know—as we have been taught since our childhood—er—the sun never sets——"

"Again!" said Mervyn, with anguish in his voice.

"Youth," said my brother-in-law, "has been rather disappointing lately. To put it mildly and without offence—er—youth has been—er—careless of its high traditions—its splendid heritage. Personally, if I may say so, I'm getting rather alarmed—perplexed, perhaps would be a better word—about—er—the carelessness, the flippancy, the recklessness of some of our young men and women."

"Shame!" said Mervyn, in a clear voice, which made Lettice laugh very merrily behind him. Others of the Glad Young Things were equally annoyed.

Southlands consulted his notes, lost their right order, looked rather helpless, and extemporised a few phrases about the glory of tradition, the spirit of service, and the admirable objects of the League of Youth. Then, quite abruptly, he turned to the Bishop and said, "We have a great orator here this evening—

a great leader—ladies and gentlemen—the Bishop of Burpham.”

I saw the Bishop rise from his chair. He stepped a pace forward on the platform, and stood there, tall and straight, with his steel-blue eyes searching the faces of his audience. There was something noble about him, something rather beautiful, like the beauty of a shining sword, so clean and keen. And as I watched him, I thought of the harshness with which he had treated his son and daughter—and wife; his reign of terror in his household; and then, of that scene when the mob had stormed into his courtyard and he had faced them with dignity and courage. A great figure in English life, a strange *revenant* from the Middle Ages and traditions repudiated by modern England.

I looked forward to hearing his speech, assured beforehand of its eloquence and interest. He would say nothing commonplace. He would tell the truth as he believed it. He wouldn't pander with falseness or flattery—even to youth!

But before he could speak a word, a sudden tumult arose in the hall. It seemed to come from the centre and spread like a sputtering fire. It began when a young woman suddenly stood on her chair, displayed a Red Flag, and cried out in a clear, shrill voice:

“Up the rebels! Long live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! Down with Bishops and all reactionaries! . . . World Revolution!”

Her words were perfectly clear, ringing into that silence which awaited the Bishop. They were followed by a loud cheer, partly shrill, partly hoarse, from a group of young men and women gathered about her.

Twisting round in my chair, I caught a glimpse of the woman with the flag, which she was waving in a rhythmic way above the heads of her supporters. It was—I was certain—the tall creature with rat-tailed hair who had pushed a pamphlet under Frank Hardy's bedroom door. She was still in that green silk frock which left her arms bare.

The Bishop raised his hand very calmly for silence, but silence did not come. It was the beginning of a pandemonium in which I heard the shouts of “World Revolution!” followed by the droning of a hymn to the Red Flag and mingled cries

of "Silence! Shame! Sit down there!" from some elderly members of the audience.

Elizabeth came to the edge of the platform and held out her hands with a kind of appeal. I heard her say "My dears!" but could hear no more of her speech.

"This is rather amusing," said Mervyn, leaning towards me and laughing loudly.

Lettice, behind us with Tremayne, stood up, let her cloak slip from her shoulders and stood on her own seat.

"Play fair!" she cried. "Free speech! This isn't cricket, you know!"

There was further disturbance, added to what was already happening, in other parts of the hall. Long-haired young men, in soft collars and lounge suits, were booing the Bishop. Short-haired young girls, who seemed to be their sisters or sweethearts, were uttering shrill cries of derision or contempt for that tall, straight figure who stood motionless on the platform with a faint smile about his lips.

I heard again single words, and shouts, and slogans.

"Youth . . . Up the Reds! . . . Down with Capital! . . . No Bishops! . . . Revolution! . . . Liberty!"

Frank Hardy jumped down from the platform, and I was aware of him by my side.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "Do you think we could chuck them out? It's that infernal woman Ruth Windle, and her fanatical brother."

Mervyn was already climbing over some of the chairs. The camellia had fallen from his buttonhole, but he looked very cool, and elegant, and agile.

"Bravo, Mervyn!" cried Lettice.

She stood there on her seat, excited, flushed, with a fire of excitement in her eyes. Tremayne was holding her hand lest she should fall.

Mervyn jumped over the backs of some chairs. Next to the girl with the Red Flag was a tall, dark-haired young man shouting wildly. He stopped shouting when Mervyn hit him across the mouth. He staggered, and fell limp among his friends, and the girl with the Red Flag fell on top of him, as he seemed to have clutched the folds of her banner. It was the

beginning of isolated fights which created uproar throughout the hall. Some of Elizabeth's young men from Walworth sided against the Communists and treated them roughly. But they were cut off from Mervyn's group by rows of chairs, and that young man was single-handed among the leading spirits of Red Revolution and in serious danger from the lady with the flag, who struck him repeatedly on the head with her staff while he was engaged with her male confederates.

"A rescue!" shouted Tremayne. "Yoicks!"

That languid young man who, at Oxford, had amused us by his wistful desire for the dole, lost his languor in a most astonishing way, and vaulted over a double row of chairs in the direction of Mervyn, lost to view in the *mêlée*.

"Good old Ivo!" cried Lettice. "Give 'em hell, old boy!"

One of the Communist young women squirmed her way towards my niece, and flung a handful of printed leaflets at her head.

"You ought to be scragged!" she screamed in a shrill voice.

Lettice smacked her smartly across the face, and springing down from the chair pushed her back until she fell into the lap of an old gentleman in evening dress, who said, "God bless my soul!" with an air of profound surprise.

A middle-aged lady near me was expressing her distress in a high voice.

"Disgraceful! Abominable! I have never seen such a deplorable exhibition!"

On the platform the Bishop still stood motionless, with a look of contempt in his keen, watchful eyes. My brother-in-law, Southlands, was gesticulating protests and uttering throaty sounds of anger and reproach. Elizabeth looked extremely worried but not unamused. Once she even laughed, as though she saw some comedy in this break-up of her inaugural meeting. It was when a very frail old lady in black assaulted Frank Hardy, in the belief that he was one of the Communist group. Frank was trying to reassure some of the elderly members of the audience and to restore peace by persuasion.

Presently I saw a young man spring on to the platform. He was shabbily dressed in a jacket suit and had a plain, ugly face under a shock of flame-red hair. It was David Swayne,

whom I had known as a Ruskin College man. He made earnest attempts to gain a hearing. I heard some of his words.

"... The right of free speech. . . . As a Labour man I protest against this hooliganism. . . . This doesn't help democracy or progress. . . . It lets down the younger crowd. . . ."

Things were becoming rather confused. The elderly part of the audience, the greater part of it, was surging towards the doors. But the doors were blocked by Tremayne and some of his well-dressed friends who were flinging out any young man who looked like a Communist, but might have been one of Elizabeth's earnest workers.

"This meeting is at an end," announced my brother-in-law. He whispered to the Bishop, who nodded, turned, and walked slowly to the back of the platform, where he disappeared through a swing door, followed by the Cabinet Minister, the Labour Member of Parliament, the Anglican clergyman and the Catholic priests.

Elizabeth put her hand on the shoulder of David Swayne and looked down on the wreckage of her great idea.

"You silly children!" she cried, half laughing and half crying. "You utterly foolish young imbeciles! I'm ashamed of the whole crowd of you!"

This inauguration of the League of Youth ended in grave disorder. It was not an object lesson in the wisdom and leadership of youth. It failed to proclaim a spiritual comradeship between the classes inspired by high ideals and noble purpose. Youth, as represented by my nephew Mervyn, had lost its collar, had had its face scratched, had exulted in the ancient sport of bashing heads, and was thoroughly pleased with this exhibition of cave-man stuff. Lettice was excited and joyous over the Homeric achievements of Ivo Tremayne, like any Helen who had watched a noble butchery from the walls of Troy. She gave him her hand to kiss and said, "Well done, Ivo! Who said there's nothing in blood and the old tradition?"

The lady with the Red Flag, that strange creature Ruth Windle, marched away with her little gang singing the hymn of revolution and equally pleased, it seemed, with a successful evening.

"Damn funny!" said Mervyn. "I haven't enjoyed anything

so much for a long time. . . . Great stuff! We owe a vote of thanks to Aunt Elizabeth."

Elizabeth wept a little in the car when we drove her back to her house in Rutland Gate. But she laughed again with a touch of hysteria through her tears.

"Youth!" she said. ". . . What's to be done with it?"

"England is doomed," said the Bishop, who was staying the night with her. "The spirit of anarchy is creeping up."

XXV

THE Bishop and I had a heart-to-heart talk after that evening at the Caxton Hall. He came round to my rooms from Elizabeth's house in Rutland Gate, and I saw by the gravity of his face, or at least guessed, that Elizabeth had told him about his son's adoption of the Socialistic point of view and his nomination as a Labour candidate for Burpham. He gave me one piece of news which I had not yet heard. In order to avoid a meeting with his father at Elizabeth's house, Jocelyn had cut loose from his aunt and was sharing rooms with David Swayne somewhere down the Vauxhall Bridge Road, not far from the Houses of Parliament, but far enough to be on the outer edge of one of the worst slums in London. He was helping to edit a Labour paper and earning a small salary which probably paid for his cigarettes. Elizabeth was still his banker.

"Needless to say," said the Bishop, "he will never get a penny from me so long as he allies himself with the enemies of his country and continues to disgrace my name. Elizabeth tells me that he proposes to insult me in my own cathedral city by standing for Labour there at the next Election. I have had a very serious quarrel with my sister—I have had to express my extreme displeasure with her—for concealing this deliberate outrage against the ordinary code of decency between father and son, to say nothing of loyalty and affection. Elizabeth has been guilty of most dishonest conduct in hiding all these things from me. I had implicit faith in her truthfulness, though very little in her wisdom—and I shall never speak to her again, because of her encouragement of Jocelyn's anarchy. She is aiding and abetting him in defiance of everything which I hold sacred and true."

Elizabeth must have had a bad time with her brother at the breakfast-table. I felt very sorry for her after the failure of

her inaugural meeting. But I felt sorry also for the Bishop. That austerity of his, so harsh and unyielding, was not due to any ill-nature in him. He was not a bully or a disciplinarian, because of bad temper, or pride, or passion. It was due to principles which he believed to be the essential verities of life, in conflict with falsity, ignorance, and the spirit of evil. He believed that his country would be brought to ruin, religion overthrown, and civilisation destroyed if he and other men did not stand fast against the subversive tendencies of the time and this revolutionary spirit which seemed to be represented by his son's challenge and defiance.

He revealed for a moment a tenderness which moved me a good deal.

"That boy of mine," he said—"so handsome and so captivating! He little knows how much I have loved him, how earnestly I have hoped and prayed for his happiness and success. I had set my heart on a brilliant career for him at Oxford. He was sent down—disgraced! In his boyhood I used to thank God for having given me this son, so talented, so wonderfully good-looking, so high-spirited. . . . Now I would rather he had died in his cradle than ally himself with these abominable men who are undermining not only the foundations of English life—every tradition upon which our strength has been built—but the fundamental laws of Christian civilisation."

He sat there in a chair I had placed for him with his back to the window, with his hands folded on his knees, and was silent for a while after those last words. I think he was unconscious of my presence while that silence lasted, thinking deeply of world problems and the social revolution that was happening all about him, breaking through the old barriers which he believed to be the last bulwarks against anarchy and irreligion.

"My lord," I said at last, "I think you are too pessimistic. Perhaps you don't make enough allowance for the inevitable changes of social organisation and democratic progress."

"Progress!" he exclaimed bitterly, jerking up his head. "In what direction? Progress towards folly—anarchy—ruin, do you mean?"

"I'm not a politician," I said. "I'm not much of a philos-

opher. I have few convictions, of absolute certainty. I'm just a looker-on at life—groping. And it seems to me that we must be rather patient even with folly.”

“With anarchy too?” he asked with harsh irony. “I cannot follow your meaning—unless you too are on the side of evil.”

“No,” I said. “But I try to understand. It's very difficult, but unless we understand the spirit behind the ideals and motives of all this rebellion against the old code and traditions, we shall be swept on one side by forces beyond our control. Don't you think, for instance, that instead of casting your son off for ever it would be better to have a talk with him and get his point of view?”

“He has cast *me* off,” said the Bishop. “He refuses to see me. In any case my arguments would fall on deaf ears. He is obstinate in his rebel mood.”

“I don't know him very well,” I admitted, “but I believe that this boy of yours, like all this youth of ours, and masses of men and women to-day, is animated by a sense of justice rather than injustice, and by high ideals rather than low ideals. Even those Communists—who make little plots in back rooms and conspire to destroy the Capitalist system, and write dreadful little pamphlets full of false economics and bad history—are devil-worshippers, out for destruction for its own sake.”

“What then?” asked the Bishop. “I disagree with you utterly. They have sold themselves to the spirit of evil. They are inspired with nothing but envy, greed, and all malice.”

“Are we sure that that is the whole secret of it?” I asked. “Are we sure that they aren't made bitter by the injustice they see around them, and believe—foolishly, no doubt—that they are crusaders against evil, the tyranny of Mammon, the wickedness of Trusts, industrialism, commercial rivalries, and combinations which lead to war and the slaughter of youth? Communism, Socialism, a thousand other isms, may be unworkable—I think they are—but can we pretend that Capitalism and the present state of society are God-ordained and have reached ultimate perfection? Our little Revolutionaries, our Labour leaders, this anarchy of youth, all this industrial and political strife, seem to me the blundering efforts of humanity to try out some new experiment which will give

greater justice to the common man, prevent the abomination of another world-war, and lead to some new standard of happiness. It's humanity on the move again, after the shock and convulsion of the last war which smashed up our old traditions. One can't quarrel with humanity on the move. One can't quarrel with the ocean tides. One can only try to direct and control their forces. That's why, among other things, I want to understand these young people of ours with sympathy and an open mind."

The Bishop listened to me patiently, to these crude, doubtful thoughts of mine, badly expressed, groping. But I saw an impatient curl of his lip, an ironical contempt in his eyes.

"Deplorable weakness!" he said. "Sympathy like yours only plays into the hands of the destroyers. These problems of ours to-day aren't new. Those revolutionary ideas are as old as history—the same old idiocies which destroyed ancient empires as they are now destroying ours. I have been a student of history. It is part of my training and duty. I see in modern England precisely the same evils, exactly the same weaknesses which led to the downfall of Rome and the decadence of Greece. Only by the same old virtues of the human race—courage, discipline, hard work, obedience to the eternal laws of God—can we hope to resist decadence and death. Those virtues are derided and despised. 'Where there is no vision the people perisheth.'"

"We want a new leadership," I said. "Perhaps Labour will produce some great man, a son of the people, who will create a new spirit and give nobler vision to the masses."

I was arguing against him partly because I wanted to break the blow of Jocelyn's rebellion, partly because lately, in wakeful hours, I had been pondering over these things and trying to keep an open mind, unbiassed by inherited tradition or the ruts of a middle-aged mind.

The Bishop shook his head and smiled at my optimism, or my credulity.

"Labour," he said, "has put its faith in Socialism as its guiding light. It is a soulless creed, and its leaders are either hypocrites or dupes. They use emotional words, like Liberty and Equality, to hypnotise their followers. Some of them—

the most ignorant among them—may be sincere in believing that Socialism would lead to liberty. Their intellectual leaders know perfectly well that Socialism is not a system of liberty and human kindness, but a tyrannical despotism which would create a State-controlled servitude of the masses, and deny freedom of speech, freedom of labour, freedom of individual life—even freedom of love, marriage and birth. Society would be at the mercy of Government officials, administering innumerable statutes for the regulation of the sheeplike masses. No such creed can produce great leaders or great minds.”

So we argued, and I listened respectfully to his pronouncements and philosophy, though filled with a growing impatience for his pessimism. He saw no hope ahead for England or the Empire. He had a bitter scorn for democracy, which he regarded as an exploded fetish. He said that the Labour Party was more dangerous than open Communism, because it proclaimed a false moderation and covered its menace under a constitutional cloak.

Towards the end of our conversation he paced slowly up and down my room with his hands clasped behind his back, and then abruptly he stopped this discussion and made an appeal which rather startled me and revealed the purpose of his visit.

“All these things, after all,” he said, “are theoretical. Time alone will prove their falsity or truth. . . . I shall not live to see the downfall of the British Empire or the ruin of England. What matters to me now, apart from patriotism, is the fate of my own flesh and blood. I want you to rescue that son of mine, my reckless Jocelyn. I have no influence over him. Any words of mine merely embitter him. But you are a younger man, and a man in sympathy with youth. They read your books. Jocelyn admires you. I may say he has an affection for you. I implore you to use this sympathy with him to bring him back to common sense and loyalty. As a father, deeply wounded by his rudeness, gravely concerned for his future, desperately anxious for his spiritual welfare, I ask this favour of you.”

He held out his hand to me, and I was startled to see that his eyes—those steely hawk’s eyes—were wet with tears. I was much embarrassed, and much touched. But he was ask-

ing me to do something which I felt was quite beyond my power and opportunity. Jocelyn did not favour me with any intimacy of friendship or confidence. I had hardly seen him since that week-end at Burpham. In any case he was following his own line of adventure, and was not likely to be put aside by anything that I could do or say.

"My dear Bishop," I said, "I'm afraid I have no influence with your son."

"I beg of you!" he answered. "You are the only man I know to whom I can turn for help in this matter. Up at Burpham I am cut off from him, and in any case, he has cut himself off. If you would befriend him, keep a kindly eye on him, warn him of the dangerous folly into which he is so rashly plunging, I should be heartily grateful to you. For his mother's sake as well as my own I ask this favour of you."

"If I can be of the slightest use——" I said, with great hesitation. "But I doubt my own wisdom. My own uncertainties are too great. I'm bewildered by all these post-war problems, and above all by this post-war youth."

"You love England," he argued. "You are friendly with the younger crowd. Your persuasion may be more powerful than my dogmatisms. Friendship with a man like you would at least restrain him from extreme folly. For all I know, he might be captured by the propagandists of Red Revolution."

I was, I confess, rather flattered by his confidence in my honour and character. I was certainly touched by this appeal from a man who had always relied, I am sure, upon his own strength and judgment.

"I will do my best to keep in touch with him," I said. "My friendship is his, if he will accept it. But I warn you that my influence is likely to be negligible."

"I think otherwise," he assured me, and gripped my hand before he left me, feeling, as I must admit, rather disconcerted and overpowered by this visit from that remarkable man.

That night I lay awake thinking of the problems he had raised and many points in our discussion, and that pledge I had made to keep in touch with his son. Unable to sleep, I turned to a book on the table by my bedside. It was Nancy's novel, in her "scrawly" hieroglyphics. "First the Bishop's son, and

now the Bishop's daughter," I said aloud, as I turned to the first page of those penny exercise-books. "What does Miss Nancy make of life, I wonder? 'The Foolish Virgin,' eh? Well, I expect she's right."

I read a good deal of that manuscript, entertained and even astonished by this young girl's novel. It was audacious, comical, moving, fresh—wonderfully fresh—in its style and outlook. It was life from the windows of a cathedral city. It was filled with shrewd little touches of character—those old ladies stepped out from the pages like Jane Austen's women—and it was old age brought to the judgment-seat by youth. It was rebellious yet rather tender, as though this child pitied those old people around her and loved them, though she laughed at them. It was startling, here and there, in its candour, its intimate revelation of girlhood touched by passion, desiring adventure and escape from convention and restraint. Now and again something of the bigness and tragedy of life crept through when she described her hero in London after the war, out of a job, fighting against disillusion and despair. Frank Hardy had given her that knowledge and had let her look into his soul more than he had ever guessed. But the story didn't matter. It was the girl's whimsicality, frankness, humour, delicacy of touch, which delighted me.

"Good heavens!" I said, when I put down the last of those penny exercise-books as the greyness of a London dawn was creeping through my window-panes, "I shall have to give up writing. These children are putting us out of date. . . . Nancy Pomeroy, that demure little Bishop's daughter—incredible! It's written with the fine touch of a silver-point etching. It takes one's breath away."

After breakfast I put all the penny exercise-books—I had skipped some of them—into a big envelope, and wrote a note to the publisher of my own books, and said: "The baby who wrote this will make a big public laugh and cry. What more do you want if you're looking for a 'best seller' to put in your beastly advertisements?"

Then I wrote to young Jocelyn and invited him to dinner. "The Pomeroy family," I thought, "is going to waste a lot of my time. It's all Elizabeth's fault, bless the woman!"

XXVI

IT was to fulfil that promise to the Bishop and to get a closer understanding of ideas working like yeast in the minds of the younger generation that I went out of my way to establish contact with Jocelyn Pomeroy and his group of friends, among whom, most powerful in influence and character, was that young man David Swayne, whom I had first met as a Ruskin College student.

The strange friendship which had begun at Oxford between those two, one so typical of the aristocratic caste—elegant, finely-cut, supercilious—the other shabby, awkward, earnest, and class-conscious as a son of the people, had continued and strengthened now that they were in London together and beginning to face the real conflict of life. Even now I find it difficult to explain this comradeship between them, though, as I met them together, and listened to their arguments—sometimes in my own rooms, where presently Jocelyn began to drop in several nights a week for a drink and a yarn, sometimes at Elizabeth's on her Thursday evenings, sometimes in cheap little restaurants anywhere between Chelsea and Soho, where they invited me to join them—I was able to watch the intellectual relationship between this oddly-assorted couple. It was the attraction of opposites. Jocelyn, always immaculately dressed, with a perfectly-cut dinner jacket and little butterfly tie, the last word in elegance (at Elizabeth's expense), found some secret pleasure—occasionally revealed by humorous glances in my direction—in the company of this fellow with flaming hair which refused to lie down, who generally wore a blue serge suit, baggy at the knees, and still kept a trace of his northern burr of speech, though, as I noticed, he took care with his grammar, and had developed a certain ease of social confidence, due to Jocelyn's company and contact with London life. Jocelyn chaffed him, "pulled his leg" continually,

dragged him into embarrassing situations such as smart night clubs frequented by little ladies of the Lettice type, who stared at Swayne as though a savage had intruded into their social sphere, and while professing allegiance to the Labour creed uttered heresies which shocked the soul of his democratic friend and ridiculed the pose and pretensions of its leaders. They argued and quarrelled in a philosophical way for hours until sometimes I had to turn them out of my rooms, although I was vastly entertained by these discussions on liberty, democracy, heredity, environment, morality, and the meaning and purpose of life.

There were times when I suspected that Jocelyn was merely using David as a kind of punching ball for his own intellectual exercises, and as a butt for his peculiar sense of humour. It may have given him an amusing thrill of conceit to be seen about with this ill-dressed democrat, especially among smart friends. But there was more in it than that. I began to perceive that Jocelyn had a real affection for his friend and a sense of loyalty towards him. I think also David attracted him, even fascinated him, by his intense sincerity, his Puritanical sense of morality, his devotion to the Labour Cause. Underneath Jocelyn's flippancy of manner there was something of his father's passion for truth and justice, but whereas in the Bishop's case this was rooted in the old traditions, in Jocelyn's mind it was inspired by a rebel spirit embittered by his father's intolerance, by a generous belief in social equality, and by an intellectual revolt against all the privileges and pretensions of his own class which seemed to him "unfair." Now and again he weakened, and tried to dodge his own convictions. Once or twice, in my rooms, when we were alone together, he confessed that he was "fed up" at times with those Labour "Johnnies," as he called them.

"They've middle-class minds," he said. "All their hot air about the social revolution and their hatred of Capitalism merely means that they want to get more power into their own hands and to feather their own little nests. They fairly bask in Royal garden-parties and social functions. The other night I met some of the ex-Labour Ministers at a reception in St. James's Square. They were putting on frills to any extent,

and highly delighted when they could get a word with a duchess or a noble lord. The floor was strewn with their h's, as Aunt Elizabeth once remarked, but I never saw such a pitiful display of snobbishness."

"Why don't you give up their company?" I asked. "You haven't the Labour type of mind. Better withdraw, old lad, before you have to 'rat' in a rather undignified way."

"No," he said. "One can't condemn a creed because some of its leaders have the usual weaknesses of human nature. I'm all for the rank and file of the Labour crowd. The masses aren't getting a fair deal, even yet, and anyhow the Conservative point of view makes me sick. I've heard it too often from my honoured father, with his duty and discipline theories and his reverence for the sacred rights of the rich Thugs who hold the nation by the neck. I fail to see how he reconciles it with Christianity."

"'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,'" I remarked.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Perhaps! But I'm not going to render to Winston Churchill the things that are Winston Churchill's, or render to Lord Ikeystein the things that are Lord Ikeystein's. . . . Besides, I'm going to play the game by Aunt Elizabeth. She has set her heart on my giving a lead to the new idea—whatever that may mean!—and although it amuses me a good deal, and I see a lot of humbug in it, I've gone too far to let her down. Likewise David, who has led me by the hand to the dwelling-places of democracy, would be very hurt if I deserted to the enemy."

"Jocelyn," I said, "I never know if you are pulling my leg or if you have serious convictions behind that smiling mask of yours. Take off the mask, old lad, just for a moment, and let me look at your bright young soul and the truth therein. Are you a young knight about to slay the dragon of injustice, or merely a jester banging a bladder at the bald head of old age?"

"I'm a fair flower of modern youth," he answered lightly. "With a worm i' the bud."

He was not giving himself away.

As for David Swayne, it was easy enough to see why he fell under the spell of Jocelyn and nursed this friendship, in spite of frequent exasperations and embarrassments and argumentative quarrels. To him Jocelyn represented everything he had missed in life—good looks, charm of manner, brilliance of speech and wit, gaiety of life, social privilege. He suffered from the inferiority complex to an advanced degree, especially in regard to all those little things of social ease and custom which were part of Jocelyn's nature but very difficult to this son of the mines. Often I saw him looking at Jocelyn with a kind of admiring resentment, as though he thought it atrociously unfair, and yet rather splendid, that this friend of his should wear such wonderful clothes and face life and ladies with such smiling insolence.

At other times I saw a dog-like devotion in his eyes for this friend who had adopted his own gospel and come over from the "enemy" into his own camp, and declared war on his own caste—this Bishop's son who listened to his arguments, his dogmatism, his passionate convictions, his class prejudice and political ambitions, with an amused agreement, a jeering sympathy, sometimes carrying the logic of his words to extreme and dangerous lengths, so that he pretended that to be really honest they ought to be really Red, and not stop in a half-way house of bourgeois respectability, trying to get the best out of both worlds.

"Of course," said Jocelyn, one night in my rooms when he had come back with David from a new play at the Duke of York's, "you and I, David, are like the Girondists at the time of the French Revolution, or the old Liberals in Russia before Lenin took charge. If we're up against the Capitalist system—as we are, I fancy?—it's ridiculous and dishonest to play about like this at constitutional evolution and revolution with rose-water. One side or the other is the only straight course. Red or Black. Not Pink, like Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden and Mr. Jingo Thomas, who likes his bottle of bubbly over a well-laid table in the Ritz. We shout about social injustice—at least you do—in hollow and sepulchral tones, but what you really mean is that you want more money for yourself and less for the other fellow, and all the pleas-

ures of life without any of its dangers and sacrifices. The Reds are prepared to live dangerously for their faith. Some of them are in prison, poor swine. Most of them are at least poverty-stricken and don't drink other people's whisky in Whitehall Court."

"Man," said David Swayne, "you're talking pernicious nonsense as usual, and you know it. Labour has no use for Red Revolution, or any other kind of bloody violence. The ballot box and political education are the only weapons we want to establish a better system of social equality, and fair play all round. If we don't destroy those Red maniacs they're going to destroy us."

"They interest me," said Jocelyn. "It may be a good thing if they do destroy us. Why not? Speaking academically——"

They were off again, and Jocelyn winked at me when David was stirred to anger and lapsed into his northern way of speech.

Once or twice I caught a glimpse of the real Jocelyn without his mask, or thought I did. It was when he met my niece Lettice now and then, by accident. They were not on friendly terms, it seemed. At least there were strained relations between them. When they came across each other they were as quarrelsome as Beatrix and Benedick, though with a more serious exasperation beneath their verbal duels. It was Lettice who led the assault, with deliberate impertinence and intent to wound.

So it was, I remember, one night when Jocelyn and David were in my rooms again, chatting quietly enough, not about politics but books. We had been dining in Soho, and I had brought them home to have a look at an old print I had bought—a lovely mezzotint which I had picked up as a bargain in the Charing Cross Road. It was eleven o'clock by the sonorous strokes of Big Ben when Jocelyn drew up his long legs from my most luxurious chair and said, "Well, I'm for bed! Aunt Elizabeth ought to be back from her class-conscious boys in Walworth."

"And I'll get back to my class consciousness," said David, who was becoming accustomed to that jibe.

It was then that I heard a pinging of my electric bell and went to answer the door.

Lettice was outside, with Ivo Tremayne. She stood there smiling, with a white cloak falling away from her pretty shoulders and bare arms. Tremayne had an opera hat at the back of his head and his shirt-front gleamed white.

"Hullo, Nunky!" said Lettice. "Ivo and I have been picnicking with highbrows in the King's Road. Art, literature, Freudian complexes, and very little to eat or drink. What about some coffee and sandwiches?"

"I'm not a public restaurant," I remarked.

"No," she answered, "but you're a good kind uncle with a service flat."

"Jocelyn's here," I told her, "with David Swayne."

For a moment she looked disconcerted, and I saw a little colour creep up from her neck.

"Well, I daresay he'll be glad to see me. Ivo says I'm looking my best to-night."

"Fascinating!" said Tremayne. "But not more so than usual, if you'll allow me to say so."

"I like you to say so," said Lettice.

They came into my room, and Lettice dropped her cloak over one of my chairs and showed herself in a shimmering frock which hadn't much to it, as the Americans say, but was quite charming.

"Hullo, Jocelyn!" said Lettice. "How's Bolshevism?"

"Hullo, Lettice," said Jocelyn. "How's Capitalism—and its dancing daughters?"

"Getting ready to smash the Reds," said Lettice. "Ever heard of the O.M.S.? It is officially known as the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. It's preparing for next May Day, when you little Labour laddies are threatening England with dire things. Privately those letters stand for 'Orders to Murder Socialism.' You'd better be warned in time. You'd better come back to your own crowd. We'll kill the fatted calf for you! . . . 'There's more rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth . . .'"

"You know Mr. Swayne," I remarked.

"Extremely well," said Lettice, holding out her hand.

The last time I had seen these two together was at Southlands that night when Swayne had made a scene at my brother-in-law's table, before that accident when Lettice had been kind to him in a spirit of *noblesse oblige*. They had met since then once or twice, at Elizabeth's house and elsewhere, but not when I was present.

"How do you do?" asked Lettice.

He didn't answer, "Nicely, thank you," as on that afternoon in Jocelyn's rooms at Oxford. In Jocelyn's company he had learnt the right reply.

"Quite well, thanks. How are you?"

But his face reddened again, and his eyes avoided the smiling gaze of this girl whose spangled frock made him look so shabby in his workaday clothes.

"I've a bone to pick with you, Mr. Swayne," said Lettice, with mock gravity.

He looked startled and distressed.

"How's that?"

"You once told me you'd play fair," said Lettice. "Do you remember?"

He remembered that scene in the garden at Southlands when he had said good-bye to her, as I had been told. He looked hopelessly embarrassed at the remembrance of that emotional moment.

"That's so," he said. "And I hope I've done so."

"You haven't," said Lettice. "I don't object to anything you say or do for your own side, much as I disagree with your political views. But it's distinctly unfair to make a convert—or a pervert—of an emotional youth like Jocelyn. One of *our* side, you know, before he 'ratted.'"

Jocelyn answered for his friend, with an air of complete tranquillity, touched by amusement, but rather too elaborately played to be quite sincere.

"Not emotional. I 'ratted,' as you call it, because of an absence of emotion—a cynical understanding of life as it is led by those who would dance a fox-trot over their mother's grave and drink cocktails in a night club when their lovers were dying or their country doomed."

"A fine political peroration," said Lettice. "It would sound

jolly well as spoken from a packing-case to a mob of the unwashed proletariat. Do you find those flights of imagination in the gospel according to Karl Marx?"

"I throw off little things like that quite easily," said Jocelyn. "Whenever I'm at a loss for inspiration to denounce the sins of society, I glance at your photograph. I keep it in my desk at the office of the *Labour Weekly*. It's the one you gave me one night at Southlands when I knew less about life than now. Do you recall the incident?"

She recalled it. Perhaps it was some such incident as I had seen that night when I had gone down to fetch a book by Galsworthy. She cried '*touchée*,' not by any word but by a change of colour.

"So you keep my photograph!" she said, a little weakly, I thought. "How charming of you!"

Not a word had passed between Tremayne and Jocelyn, but Tremayne now held out his cigarette-case and said, "Have one, old man?"

"I'm not smoking," said Jocelyn, but five minutes later or less, he took out his own case and lit a cigarette.

Lettice turned on my gramophone—one of those things in a walnut cabinet—and said: "Give me a dance, Ivo, while uncle orders some coffee and several sandwiches."

"Give Jocelyn a turn," suggested Tremayne good-naturedly.

"Does Labour dance?" asked Lettice with an air of surprise, which was well affected.

"No," said Jocelyn. "Not when their partners are too promiscuous. Labour likes loyalty. . . . That's another good phrase which I must try to remember. 'Alliteration's artful aid.'"

They spoke lightly, with this quick banter, yet somehow I smelt smouldering fires.

"*Noblesse oblige!*" said Lettice. "Dance with me, Jocelyn. The lovely daughter of Lord Dives with young Mr. Demos. What a theme for a movie!"

She held out her arms to him, but he shook his head, with the ghost of a smile about his lips, and uneasy eyes, as though tempted to weakness.

"Dance with me, Jocelyn!" commanded Lettice.

She came close to him, with an invitation in her eyes and in her hands and in her graceful body, already swaying to the time of that gramophone music. For a moment I thought Jocelyn would accept her offer. He was standing close to her, with his hands in the pockets of his dress jacket, and he took them out, as though to put his arms about her. Then a shadow seemed to pass over his face. It was when Ivo Tremayne, watching them closely, gave a laugh, which seemed to me quite friendly.

"I must be off," said Jocelyn. "I can't keep Aunt Elizabeth waiting up."

"Oh, drat Aunt Elizabeth!" said Lettice, with a real annoyance, which flashed out like a spark of lightning. Then she turned to Tremayne with a sarcastic laugh and said, "Your dance, Ivo!"

"Coming, David?" said Jocelyn.

They sloped out of my room, those two, Jocelyn looking sulky, David following humbly. It was David, that red-haired democrat, who turned for a moment and looked back at Lettice with her head against Tremayne's shoulder as she did a few steps with him. There was a kind of grudging admiration in his gaze for this niece of mine, whose beauty had seemed to him "unfair"—"the product of six centuries of social injustice," as he once had told me.

As soon as they had gone, Lettice released herself from Tremayne's arms and shut down the gramophone with a snap.

"Enough of jazz!" she remarked. "How about that coffee, Nunky?"

When it came, she smoked several cigarettes with it, and forgot to eat the sandwiches. She spoke about Jocelyn's friendship with "the red-headed savage," as she still called Swayne, and ridiculed his political allegiance to the cause of Labour.

"It's the most ridiculous pose," she said. "Can't you get him back to commonsense and loyalty, uncle?"

"Can I get any of you back to commonsense?" I asked. "Do any of you ever take the advice of your elders?"

Lettice ignored this challenge, and made a new line of attack.

"It's Miss Pomeroy who's at the bottom of Jocelyn's absurd-

ity. She encourages him in all this Socialistic nonsense and eggs him on to betray his own crowd. Someone ought to rescue him from that emotional lady."

"One of the best women in the world!" I said warmly.

"I know," said Lettice, with her usual self-assurance. "But these good women do so much harm. They're all pandering to the poor dear working classes and pauperising them, so that they don't want to work. And they make little pets of parlour revolutionaries who think they have a mission to save the world, and talk high treason and low morality with a self-conceit that is absolutely sickening. It seems to me a pity that Jocelyn's got himself mixed up with that crowd."

"I concur," said Tremayne, judicially, helping himself to another sandwich. "A most poisonous set. I'm harking back to reaction and Tory traditions, now that I'm a man of property, with two second-hand Daimlers and the hire of a garage. I believe in the sacred rights of capital. Taxation is ruining the country, and so forth. Our Red Revolutionaries must be strangled in their cradles."

"Idiot!" said Lettice, throwing a fair-sized crumb at him.

She had rather startled me by her political outburst. It was the first time I had heard her talk in that way. There was a bitterness in her words which proved their sincerity. I wondered for a moment whether she was peeved with Jocelyn because he had deserted her haunts of pleasure for a more serious interest in life, after she had turned him down for Ivo Tremayne. Did she want to call him back again to play with her?

"Well," said Tremayne presently, "we'd better be moving on. Don't you think?"

Lettice nodded, and threw her cigarette in the fireplace.

"Yes. The night is young. Let us go in search of new adventure."

It was half-past eleven, and this girl was my niece and Helen's daughter, and very young.

"My dear," I said, fumbling with her white cloak, "surely you're going to bed now?"

"Good heavens, no!" she exclaimed. "Do you want me to sleep my little life away?"

"Where are you staying in town?" I asked. "Are your father and mother here to-night?"

"They're still down at Southlands," she told me, but did not answer my first question.

She held out her cheek for me to kiss and said: "Nice, kind uncle!" and held out her hand to Tremayne.

"Coming, Ivo? . . . I hear the pipes of Pan."

"Goodnight, sir," said Tremayne. "Thanks for those excellent sandwiches."

I heard their laughter down the quietude of Whitehall Court, after they had left my flat, and then the wheels of a taxi and the click of its doors as it shut upon them, and the bark of its horn as they drove away. Where? For what adventure of youth? . . .

I hadn't the least idea. Helen, my sister, knew perhaps just as little of her daughter's whereabouts and way of life, knew no more than I did about Ivo Tremayne and his moral character, and his exact relations with this attractive lady. Was it "all right," as these young people would have said impatiently if I had questioned them? Had human nature so altered that young men and women could go about together in the hours of the night, unchaperoned, unwatched, unguarded, without a risk of emotional happenings and adventures leading to a ruin of souls?

Standing there in the hall of my flat, with a faint, lingering scent about me, as though Lettice had left something of her spirit and beauty behind, I was overcome by a kind of panic at the thought of what might happen to this niece of mine, so lovely, so exquisite, so gay, in her adventurous mood. These young people of the post-war world could go about together in a way that would have horrified their grandparents, that alarmed and sometimes terrified their parents. It was absurd to believe that they were immune from the old temptations of young manhood and womanhood. It was not "all right." It was—surely?—all wrong. One heard of frightful tragedies. The papers were filled with them. All this pooh-poohing of the old conventions, this charge of "nasty minds" against people who warned youth of its perils, was not justified by actual facts. Things did happen, in spite of the self-assurance of youth, its

sense of security, its fearlessness and knowledge of life.

"Coming, Ivo?" Lettice had said. Coming where? To his rooms above the garage? . . . "I hear the pipes of Pan," she said. . . . Dangerous music for young ears with jade earrings below shingled hair. It was the music of paganism. In the rhythm of that jazz which had bewitched the world, the old god with the goat's feet had come back, leering at authority, religion, discipline, morality—and youth was dancing to its tune. . . .

. . . And yet, Lettice was wonderfully fresh and clean and unvicious. That fellow Tremayne looked a good type of what we used to call a gentleman—the word is going out of fashion—and he had straight-looking eyes and a good-natured smile, and no sense of guilt in them. Jocelyn, passionate, moody, satirical, cynical, rebellious, with a touch of pose about him, was not loose-lipped or sensual, but fine and clean-cut. Elizabeth, who knew him better than I, said he had a "spotless soul." His sister Nancy, who had written that surprising book, was, said Frank Hardy, as innocent as a child, though she had asked him to take her with him, and would have gone like a bird if he had called one word. Who could read this riddle? Not I. It was utterly beyond me, and held me perplexed. I could only thank heaven that I was an old bachelor without any son of my own, and—thank heaven again?—without a daughter. To be the father to a modern daughter!—Good Lord!

XXVII

ELIZABETH POMEROY, that warm-hearted lady who was the adopted Aunt of youth, went clean over to the Labour Party, so that her Thursday evenings in Rutland Gate became a social function for His Majesty's opposition and their hangers-on, including ardent young women who were prospective candidates for Parliament, earnest journalists who were the propagandists of constitutional Socialism, Trade Union leaders who pulled the strings of Labour policy, and various idealists, pacifists and sentimentalists whom she had collected in her League of Youth, which continued to exist in spite of the disorder of its inaugural meeting. Because of my life-long friendship with her and my increasing interest—and anxiety—in the political and industrial conditions of England, as a man without any party label or absolute convictions, I attended some of these queer receptions, and found them both amusing and instructive, though occasionally alarming. These people were desperately in earnest, and convinced of their own righteousness. They were not affected, it seemed to me, with that open-minded perplexity, that melancholy doubt and bewilderment, that deep-seated pessimism which I found, for instance, at Southlands where my brother-in-law and his Tory friends discussed the future of England and the world with a kind of sadness and resignation, believing that England was done, that her industrial supremacy was past, that the cost of war, high taxation, Red Revolution, and something that had broken in the spirit of the people—their old traditions and quality—were leading inevitably to the downfall of the Empire and the crumbling of our social foundations. There was nothing of that among these ex-Labour ministers and their friends who gathered round Elizabeth as their political hostess, warmed to her, no doubt, by her heavy contributions to their party funds, but also, to be fair, by her enthusiasm and jolly advocacy of their own con-

victions. These people seemed to me inspired by a kind of religious fervour. They spoke of "Labour" as though it held the only hope for humanity and the peace of the world. They had a missionary zeal, and travelled about Europe for conferences and assemblies like apostles of a new gospel of international democracy, meeting their own kind and establishing contact with leaders of the Labour ideal in many nations. They had no hatred, I found, but only a kind of pitying contempt and ridicule for their political opponents and the Tory mind, whom they classed under the one heading of reactionaries. They spoke always as though they had a calm certainty of future power. Reaction might delay their advent for a time, but education and hard economic facts would play into their hands. The insuperable stupidity of a Conservative government, its lethargy, its utter inability to face realities and deal with problems pressing hard upon the people—unemployment and bad-housing conditions, and a general demand for a higher standard of living among the working classes—would, they thought, pile up votes for Labour and sweep the country at the next general election, as it was gaining so many seats in bye-elections in the old strongholds of Tory tradition. The Conservative Government, they said, would be broken in the coal-fields. Labour had forced the Government to subsidise the miners by the threat of a general strike, and in May, when that subsidy came to an end, they would find the miners and every trade union in the country and the whole of the Labour Party solid in resistance to a lowering of wages or a lengthening of hours, or any attempt to beat them down to a lower standard of living from the scale they had gained by desperate struggle. If the miners were beaten and broken, it would mean, they said, a general attack all along the line to break up the trade unions and thrust the labouring classes back to the poverty line. The Die-hards were already conspiring to that end. The liberal ideas of the Conservative Prime Minister—a well-meaning man—would be swept on one side by the Birkenheads and Rothermeres of the conservative crowd, who were putting up the bogey of Bolshevism to frighten the prosperous middle-classes and old ladies of both sexes. But it wouldn't work again, they told me; that trick had been played once too often, and Labour,

moderate and constitutional, would sweep the country and get the reality of power which had been denied them in their first term of office.

"How about a general strike?" I asked. "That's a threat that doesn't seem to me either moderate or constitutional."

I asked the question of one of those ex-Ministers of Labour—who came now and then to Elizabeth's receptions. He was a big, square-shouldered, shambling man, with a loose mouth and jovial expression, wearing evening clothes a size too large for him, and baggy at the knees. His shirt-front was crumpled, and his black tie had worked up at the back of his collar, but he was perfectly at ease with Elizabeth and the ladies.

"That's all bunk," he said, with a shrug of his big shoulders. "There won't be no general strike. Not if I have anything to do with it, as I certainly shall. Of course it's a weapon in reserve—we can't afford to throw it away. But we'll only use it as a threat, and you'll see the same climb-down as before, when Baldwin said he wouldn't give a subsidy—not for anything on earth—and then gave it with both hands."

"Rather dangerous," I remarked—"even as a threat. If the challenge were accepted——"

He put a hand—a big, pawlike hand—on my shoulder, and drew me away a little from the other groups in Elizabeth's drawing-room.

"Mind you," he said, "I'm all against the General Strike myself, even as a threat, as you remark. I'm a constitutionalist right through, as I think I've proved. A general strike is a blow against Society. It's an 'old-up of the nation, justified, maybe, in time of revolution, but not otherwise. There's some of my colleagues and those young chaps in the trade unions are just burning to make use of it because they've got the organisation all ready to try it out—cut and dried. Well, they won't get a chance of it as long as I'm running the negotiations. No revolutionary tosh as far as I'm concerned, and they damn well know it, and some of 'em don't like me for it, though they haven't the pluck to tell me so to my face. They've no more pluck than lice, these laddies who talk about class war and all that filth. But they don't count. They make a hell of a noise, but one bang of my fist on the conference table sends them

scuttling. I'm out for England and every class in it, not for one section of society. Between you and me, I'm a Himperialist as well as a Labour man. I believe in the Hempire and a strong Navy to safeguard the future of the British race. I don't make a song and dance of it, because that sort of thing ain't popular with our little pacifists. But that's me. Constitution and Hempire, plus Democracy."

He stared round at Elizabeth's guests with a good-natured smile.

"That's a nice woman," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of Elizabeth. "A warm-hearted lady. I've been down to her working-men's club. Very good. Run on 'umane lines. There ought to be more like 'er. If some of our society wenches would do a job like that, there wouldn't be all this dam' fool talk about revolution."

I agreed with him, and told him so.

"And that's a good-looking boy," said my Labour friend, pointing a big forefinger at Jocelyn, who was standing among some of the younger crowd, looking admirable as usual in well-cut dress clothes, with a white waistcoat.

"Her nephew," I said, "Jocelyn Pomeroy, and a recruit to your party."

"Yes," he said, "a nice lad, with a bit of side about him. Well, I don't object to that. Young fellows must always 'ave their bit of pose, whatever their class. We want more recruits of that type. It gives us a bit of tone. The *Intelligentsia* and all that. No need for us to be too narrow and insist on horny-handed sons of toil. That's snobbishness—just as much as the other sort. . . . Jocelyn Pomeroy—a good old name, I wouldn't be surprised."

"Son of the Bishop of Burpham," I said.

The Labour leader, who had been one of His Majesty's Ministers of State, stared at Jocelyn with new interest.

"You don't say so! The son of that blasted Bishop who's always tilting at the miners, prophesying doom and damnation for poor old England?"

He burst into a hearty guffaw.

"No wonder he's gone Labour! I'm surprised he ain't flaming Red. Well, I'll 'ave to keep an eye on 'im. It might

do us a bit of good in the publicity line. Son of the Bishop of Burpham joins the Labour Party. Says his father is a reactionary old swine. Rather a joke, that! I'll get some of our papers to give him a write up."

Before we parted he asked me to lunch with him—at the Ritz—and later in the evening I saw him talking to Jocelyn, with his hand on the boy's shoulder.

XXVIII

IT was Frank Hardy who warned me that I was in for a row with the Bishop, and that there had been a complete severance of relation between Elizabeth and her brother. That was when Nancy Pomeroy's novel—"The Foolish Virgin"—was published by the friend to whom I had sent it with a note of recommendation. Elizabeth had received an early copy of it—one of Nancy's six presentation copies—with a little note from her niece on the day of publication. I had received another, with an amusing dedication in Nancy's "scrawly" handwriting, and glanced through its pages with renewed interest and smiling appreciation. But it seems to have caused a sensation in two households—Elizabeth's and her brother's—as later it did in other English homes.

Frank was having breakfast with Elizabeth when the parcel arrived. He was doing an almost full-time job with her now, owing to the League of Youth and other social work in which she was absorbed. A bedroom had been set aside for him in Rutland Gate, so that he could sleep there when they worked late, writing out the minutes of committee meetings, addressing circulars, organising meetings, and so on, though he still kept on his bed-sitting-room in Raphael Street.

"What's that mysterious parcel tied up with somebody's garter?" asked Elizabeth, as she sliced open her correspondence—the usual pile of letters with which Frank had to deal later—and called "Sweet, sweet!" to the canary in its golden cage at the open window.

Frank cut the blue silk ribbon which tied up the packet, and pulled out the novel with an artistic wrapper, depicting a young girl gazing very soulfully through an open window to a landscape and a winding road leading to a far-off city with a glamour of light above its chimney-pots.

"Nancy's novel—at last!" said Frank. "It looks marvelous."

The sight of it excited him, he told me. She had been writing it during those days when he had been up at Burpham with her. It was the discussion of its plot and character that had led to his secret meetings with Nancy, and her avowal of love which had scared him away as a penniless man without prospects.

"Bless the child!" cried Elizabeth. "What does *she* know about life? A demure little cathedral mouse, shut off from the world! It's bound to be nonsense!"

Elizabeth, said Frank, had two committee meetings that morning. She also had her usual engagement with the squirrels in Kensington Gardens, which she fed with monkey-nuts—woe betide the butler if he forgot to provide them!—every morning, wet or fine, before plunging into her numerous works for the good of humanity. She also had that correspondence to deal with—fifty letters at least from professional beggars, social workers, earnest young men in Walworth, destitute clergymen, Christian Scientists, spiritualistic mediums, and other people desiring her sympathy, her advice, and—always—her money.

"A busy day ahead!" she said cheerfully, and propped up Nancy's novel against the toast-rack, scanning some of its pages, while Frank read the headings of the *Daily Mail*, groaned inwardly at the thought of all those letters he would have to answer at Elizabeth's dictation, and then travelled in thought to Burpham, where Nancy would be having breakfast with her father and mother, as excited as he was, no doubt, by the first appearance of her book.

It was when he was helping himself to marmalade that Elizabeth gave a little squeal of amusement and dismay.

"God help us!" she cried. "That demure-eyed baby girl! Miss Prunes and Prisms who teaches in a Sunday school!"

"Meaning Nancy?" asked Frank, rather resentfully.

Elizabeth ignored his remark and presence. She neglected her breakfast. She forgot her engagement to feed the squirrels. She was sharp with the butler when he came to clear the breakfast things, and ordered him out of the room. She made strange ejaculatory noises which startled Frank, as she read bits of Nancy's novel, and, like most women, turned to the end before reading the beginning.

Several times she laughed very mirthfully, and then cried out in a kind of humorous anguish—

"Oh! Oh! . . . This is the worst thing that has happened yet. . . . It shocks my spinster soul. . . . It makes me blush in my old age. . . . That's the innocence of our dear little flappers!"

"Is it as alarming as all that?" asked Frank.

"It's terrifying!" said Elizabeth. "I'm going to retire to my own room until I've read this thing from cover to cover. Deal with all these letters according to your own judgment, Mr. Hardy. You know my methods and point of view."

"You have two committee meetings," said Frank. "One at eleven, and another at twelve."

"Drat the committee meetings!" said Elizabeth. "This is far more amusing. It's going to wreck my peace of mind for years. The child has drawn a wicked caricature of me—her very own aunt! She has had a great game with all the old cats in that cathedral city. She mocks at the whole crowd of us, and doesn't leave us with a rag to cover our nakedness. . . . What her father will say I tremble to think."

She retired to her room with the novel, and remained there for five hours, ignoring lunch-time. Then at last she emerged with a flushed face and an emotional light in her brown eyes.

"This book!" she said. "I've never read anything like it. It has made me weak with laughter, and I've wept like a baby over some of the chapters. That child has sized us all up. It's youth laughing at middle-age. It's life seen through the eyes of Miss Nineteen-Twenty-Six. Jane Austen in a knee-short frock as fearless as Bernard Shaw. I feel shocked and shattered."

"It didn't strike me that way," said Frank. "It seemed to me fresh and merry, and full of charming humour, like Nancy herself."

"The little mouse-eyed wretch!" said Elizabeth. "Teaches in a Sunday school, does she? Finds herself suppressed by an intolerant parent? Well, she has made her escape all right. That brother of mine will never be able to hold her now. She has jumped over the spires of that cathedral city. . . . This book is going to make a hit, unless I'm a Dutchman."

Elizabeth wasn't a Dutchman. Her literary judgment was surer than mine. Much as I had been struck by "The Foolish Virgin," I had had no idea that it would leap into such instant success. The critics fastened upon it as the very latest thing in literary novelties. Their unanimity was wonderful. Famous authors wrote reviews of it and praised it as a revelation of the young idea, as a little fountain of fresh and sparkling genius, as a thing of quaint and exquisite humour, as the most lively satire of modern life produced by one of the younger generation. Some enterprising photographer went up to Burpham and obtained a portrait of Nancy Pomeroy, looking more demure even than I had seen her—younger and more childlike than she really was. At dinner-tables I was asked continually, "Have you read 'The Foolish Virgin'?" until I tired of the question and attracted the attention of everyone when I admitted that I had not only read the novel, as it was first written, in penny exercise-books, but had recommended it for publication, and met its author in her father's house. Everybody said it was incredible that such a book should have been written by a young girl. Many people refused to believe it, and suspected that I had written it myself, not believing me when I confessed that this little girl of twenty had gone clean ahead of me in style, and freshness of outlook, and shrewdness of observation.

It was from Murdoch, the publisher, that I heard of the astonishing success of Nancy Pomeroy's first novel.

"We owe you a debt of gratitude," he said generously. "'The Foolish Virgin' is sweeping England and America like a tidal wave. It's the best seller in both countries. It's being translated into German, Swedish, Italian and other languages. It's going to be made into a movie, and the American film producers have offered fifteen thousand dollars for the rights. I'm holding out for twenty thousand on account of royalties, although, of course, I shall only get an agent's fee. That young lady will make a pretty penny before she's done. I'm arranging a contract with her for three more novels, and the American publishers are desperately keen. They're calling her, until the wire must be hot with offers, for short stories and serials. It's the biggest thing we've touched, and there's been nothing like it since 'The Constant Nymph.'"

Frank Hardy confirmed all this, having received recent letters from Nancy.

"She's terrified by her own success," he told me. "She can hardly believe it, and wants to run away and hide somewhere to avoid all this terrific publicity. . . . And, of course, it puts the lid on my little dreams."

"How's that?" I asked, surprised by this sudden lapse into gloom.

"Nancy is going to be rich," he said, as though that were a mortal blow to him. "Not much chance for a lover in a bed-sitting-room, with a job as typist-secretary to her benevolent aunt. Nancy has flown clear away. She belongs to the big world now—the world of success. I shall look on, as one of life's failures, and watch her wonderful career."

He was very sorry for himself, though glad for Nancy's sake. He told me other things, rather distressing, though not without a touch of comedy.

Nancy, it seemed, had kept this book secret from her father until several weeks after its publication. Over and over again she had tried to summon up courage to give him a copy of her novel, but, in spite of her pluck, her heart had failed her, because she guessed that he would strongly disapprove of it. It was several weeks before it reached Burpham and the Bishop's ears. The ladies of that cathedral city did not keep pace with the latest literary sensations. At the moment they were mostly reading "If Winter Comes," by Mr. Hutchinson, already behind the times. Still, one or two copies of Nancy's book reached Burpham at last. Mrs. Woodhatch, the wife of one of the Canons, received one from a niece of hers, who suggested that it would "do her good." . . . "How amazing to think that it's written by Nancy Pomeroy!" she added. "Whatever does the Bishop think of it?"

Mrs. Woodhatch read it breathlessly, and expressed her horrified amazement to the Canon, who retired to his study with it. She heard him laughing immoderately when he should have been writing a sermon, and he afterwards agreed with his wife that it was certainly very shocking, although, he was bound to say, extremely witty, and quite amazing for a young girl.

"I fail to see the wit," said Mrs. Woodhatch severely, "and

I'm surprised, Arthur, to find you chuckling over passages that seem to me extremely improper, and at times positively coarse. I always thought Nancy a nice-minded girl. I'm shocked to find that she has no sense of decency. It must be most distressing. Poor Lady Louisa!"

It was Mrs. Woodhatch who lent the book to Mrs. Murgatroyd, the wife of the Archdeacon, advising her to read it privately, and not to leave it about so that the dear Archdeacon might chance to see it. It contained a very recognisable portrait of him—wickedly caricatured—and most offensive, thought Mrs. Woodhatch.

"The daughter of our dear and noble Bishop," wrote the Canon's wife, in the note which she enclosed with the book, "has held us up to public ridicule, and disgraced her father's honoured name with a work of fiction which ought to be burnt by the public hangman. The girl, of course, must be mad."

It was Mrs. Murgatroyd, accompanied by Mrs. Woodhatch, who called on Lady Louisa Pomeroy and begged for a private interview when Nancy appeared in the drawing-room, looking far too innocent to be the author of such a scandalous work.

"We wish to see your dear mother alone," said Mrs. Woodhatch severely, and Nancy guessed the object of their visit, and retired hurriedly, with a comical glance at her mother, whose terror was visible.

The two ladies were astounded when Lady Louisa confessed that her husband was entirely ignorant of Nancy's literary escapade.

"You see," she said feebly, "he is not at all interested in fiction. He despises it so much that we were afraid to ask him to read it. . . . Oh yes, I know Nancy ought to have asked his advice before sending it to a publisher. I begged her to do so, but you know how wilful these young people are nowadays."

Secretly she had thought Nancy's book wonderful and beautiful, though very frightening.

"But, my dearest Louisa," said Mrs. Woodhatch, as Nancy's mother afterwards related, not without something of her daughter's own humour—perhaps Nancy had inherited her gift from this poor suppressed lady—"you are conniving at sin. You

are helping your daughter to hide a guilty secret. I tremble to think of your dear husband's wrath—his righteous wrath—when this dreadful bombshell bursts upon him."

"Nancy wishes to keep it from him as long as possible, for that very reason," said Lady Louisa. "He is very worried just now with the state of England. I do my best to shield him from private worries."

"Louisa," said Mrs. Murgatroyd solemnly, "this is more than a private worry. It's a public outrage. I hate to speak harshly or wound a mother's heart, but Mrs. Woodhatch and I have both decided that it is our very painful duty to ask your daughter to resign from all her Church work with which we happen to be associated. We cannot risk the contamination of young minds, the destruction of the morality of young women, by any contact with the author of 'The Foolish Virgin'—the title itself is dreadful! Either Nancy resigns from the Girls' Friendly Society and the Children's Holiday Fund, or I shall hand in my own resignation. Mrs. Woodhatch will take the same action."

Lady Louisa was alarmed and distressed. Secretly she agreed with these two tormentors that Nancy's book was slightly improper. She herself had been very much shocked by certain passages. Very gently and shyly she had pointed them out to Nancy, and asked her to explain such lack of modesty. But Nancy had laughed at her blushes, and then, suddenly, had become very angry, accusing her mother of having nasty ideas and suggesting thoughts that had never entered her head. "I'm ashamed of you, mother!" she cried. "It's your early-Victorian education which suspects evil in everything that goes on between boys and girls. All this was written frankly and simply, with a sense of humour. . . . That bit about Marjorie wanting to have a baby? Well, why not? I want to have a baby. I'm dying to have a baby. So does every girl who is decent and nice-minded, with motherly instincts."

How could Lady Louisa argue with Nancy about things like that? How could she accuse her of immodesty or indecency when the child was so perfectly good and simple, so angry with any suggestion of morbid thoughts? So, afterwards, she told me with tears in her eyes.

She defended Nancy against the two ladies, even against her own convictions and old-fashioned ideas.

"We are out of date, my dears," she said. "The girls of to-day think differently about these things. Their minds are quite different. Perhaps they have *nicer* minds!"

Mrs. Murgatroyd raised her hands and gave a little cry of horror.

"Louisa! I cannot believe my ears. You, of all women! Our ideal of motherly and wifely virtue!"

They begged of her, they implored her, they even commanded her to lay the book before the Bishop and ask his spiritual advice, not only as a husband but as a priest.

"It is not only a duty to your husband," said Mrs. Woodhatch, "it is a duty to the younger generation and public morals."

And that evening, after dinner, and after hearing all this from her mother, Nancy went to her father's library, that big panelled room where I had first been received by him, and held her novel in her hand and said.

"Father, here's something I've written. I ought to have told you before, but I didn't want to worry you."

He was busy with an article for the *Quarterly Review*—that masterly article which afterwards I read with admiration and respect for its keen analysis of England's industrial and social problems, written with knowledge, strength, and truth, though tragic in bitterness and pessimism.

He looked up from his work and smiled at her, his thoughts still concentrated on some line of logic.

"A novel?" he said. "I never read novels, my dear, except the old classics, now and then. Why do you want me to read it?"

"It's *my* novel," said Nancy. "I wrote it, father. It's becoming rather—famous!"

She laughed at the thought of that extraordinary fame which was reaching out to her as far as Burpham. That very morning she had had requests from three photographers for special sittings and several invitations to literary dinners in London, and a whole collection of reviews, ridiculous in praise of her simple little story, so ridiculous that she laughed at them, and

put them all in the waste-paper basket and said, "What rubbish they write about me!"

Her father picked the book up and read the title.

"The Foolish Virgin"—By Nancy Pomeroy.

It was quite a time before the idea seemed to enter his mind that this was his Nancy Pomeroy and this a book she had written.

"You wrote this?" he asked, in a dazed way.

"Yes, father. Months ago. Just as a joke . . . to pass the time away."

"For children?" he asked.

"Oh no!" said Nancy. "At least—not for quite *young* children, father."

"Suitable for the Girls' Friendly Society?" he asked. "Biblical stories and so on?"

"Well, hardly that!" said Nancy, smiling at some secret thought. "More grown-up, father. A real novel, you know. A picture of life, written with a touch of humour. Some of it will make you laugh."

"I hope so," he said rather grimly. "I would like to laugh. I don't find much to laugh about these days, what with Jocelyn's behaviour, and all these troubles in England, and general stupidity."

He was handling the novel, glancing through some of its pages.

"I'll read it," he said. "I'm rather—well—startled, to see it ready-made like this. . . . You kept it a secret from me, eh? . . . I'm sorry about that, Nancy."

"You have so much to worry about," said Nancy, sympathetically. "Poor old daddy—always worrying about the state of the world and little old England!"

"Thanks, my dear," he said. "We all need a little love in our lives. . . . I miss Jocelyn. . . . Well, I'll read this book of yours. This article can wait. Nobody will pay the slightest attention to it. A novelist, eh, Nancy? Well, you've begun at an early age. What do you know about life, my dear?"

It was what his sister Elizabeth had said. ". . . What does she know about life, that demure-eyed baby?"

"No hurry, father," said Nancy.

She slipped from the room as he sat back in his chair, adjusting his spectacles, with her book opened at its first page.

It was eight o'clock then. It was past midnight when he came out of the library with a heavy tread. She and her mother were waiting up for him, like a mother and daughter in the Middle Ages awaiting some judgment which would mean life or death.

Nancy was playing a game of Patience in front of the great fireplace with its burning logs. Lady Louisa was doing embroidery, but now and then her work dropped to her lap and she listened intently.

"Don't worry, mother!" said Nancy several times during that long wait. Secretly she was also worrying.

"I'm afraid he won't like it, darling," said Lady Louisa.

"A poor thing, but mine own!" said Nancy, trying to be gay. But, as she afterwards wrote to Frank Hardy, her lover, courage oozed out of her as the hours passed, and still her father did not appear. Then at last he came, with that heavy tread, from his room.

He had her novel in his hand as he came into the drawing-room.

"Well, father?" said Nancy brightly. "Have you read my foolish little work?"

He went slowly towards the fireplace. His face was rather white and drawn. Suddenly, with a dreadful gesture of anger and disgust, he flung her book, that beautiful new book of hers, with its clean wrapper and that girl looking out of a window at the great city of life, into the very heart of the flames.

"Nancy," he said, "I would rather you had died than have written a book like that. It's steeped in the spirit of immorality. It has shocked my inmost soul. You have disgraced my name and stripped yourself of all decency. You stand naked in the market-place for the public gaze, and I am outraged by your gross immodesty. I can never forgive you."

"Father!" cried Nancy.

She burst into tears—"Howling!" as she told Frank—and her mother could not comfort her. Her father turned his back on both of them and left the room. In his own face there was an agony of grief.

XXIX

IT seemed to me absurd, unjust, and very annoying anyhow, that I should be made responsible for the peccadilloes of all those young people to whom I played the part of bachelor uncle. I was becoming too much involved in their adventures, and because I stood on their side, to some extent, watching them with friendly eyes, giving them a little advice now and then—which they never took by any kind of chance—and “standing treat” now and again at theatres and restaurants, I found myself under fire from their anxious parents as though I were on the side of revolt against authority.

I received a severe letter from the Bishop of Burpham, who held me directly responsible for the publication of his daughter's book. He accused me of disloyalty to the confidence he had given me, as well as to the moral standards of my own profession as a literary man. I had taken advantage of a young girl's lamentable indiscretion—he desired to write mildly and with restraint—and exploited it for commercial purposes.

“Girls of a certain age,” he wrote, “have no doubt, instincts and impulses which surge up from their subconsciousness and play round the idea of romantic love. Nancy put down her thoughts in writing, with some skill and humour and gifts of style which, I admit, are startling and even amazing. But a man of your age and character ought to have realised that what she may have written in childish innocence must appear to the public as grievously immodest. By recommending her book to a publisher without any word to me, you have not only destroyed my faith in your judgment and honour but have inflicted a very grave injury upon public morality and good taste. . . .”

I am bound to say this letter gave me a twinge of conscience. I had certainly been a little careless about this girl's novel. I

had skipped a few parts, here and there, before sending it to Murdoch with high praise. But now, re-reading it from the first page to the last, I couldn't bring myself to agree with the Bishop's sweeping condemnation. On the contrary, I could find no evil in it. It was frank, certainly. There were passages which I should have hesitated to write because of their sheer simplicity and candour, but it was a fearlessness of thought which was characteristic of modern youth, without a trace of morbid or suggestive meaning. And it was so touched with humour and tenderness, so young and fresh, that I could not condemn it or dislike it, or regret my share in presenting it to the public. Nevertheless, I was hurt by the Bishop's letter, and particularly by the last page of it which referred not to Nancy Pomeroy but to young Jocelyn.

"... I release you from your promise to keep a friendly eye on Jocelyn," wrote the Bishop—"I doubt the value of your influence, and in any case my son is lost to any sense of shame or loyalty. According to a newspaper cutting that has reached me, he has recently appeared on a public platform with a group of Labour politicians who denounced me by name as a reactionary cleric and an enemy of England. I do not object to being dubbed a reactionary. I believe in reaction against stupidity, insanity, and the evil tendencies of this deplorable time. But I am ashamed of a son who is willing to associate with men who abuse his father and exploit his name for that purpose. When you see him, tell him I am broken-hearted over this disloyalty, which I am very much afraid you yourself have encouraged as much as my sister Elizabeth, who is helping to ruin the country by her political madness."

That "wiggling" from the Bishop, undeserved, I felt, was not unexpected. But I confess I was surprised to receive a visit from my brother-in-law, Southlands, who expressed displeasure with me, also, because he held me partly accountable for the reckless behaviour of Lettice and Mervyn, who were causing him the gravest anxiety.

He came on to my rooms after a debate in the House of Lords—something to do with the Government schemes for the

relief of unemployment—and I saw at once that he was more than ordinarily gloomy and dejected.

“How’s Helen?” I asked.

He told me that my sister was worried and far from well.

“Perhaps she ought to see a doctor,” I suggested, but he said that doctors could not cure mental maladies.

“Is there any particular cause of trouble?” I asked, rather anxiously.

Southlands hummed and hawed a little, grew rather red in the face, and threw a perfectly good cigar into my fireplace—which was a sure indication of unusual distress, because he was not careless with money or things that cost money, however trivial.

“The fact is,” he said, “I’ve had a stand-up row with Mervyn and have threatened to clear him out of house and home. Needless to say, Helen tries to shield him from my displeasure, which has led to bickerings between us, as you can easily guess. My nerves are not what they used to be, and doubtless I’ve said sharper things than I’ve really meant. It’s all very distressing.”

Then he unbosomed himself of all his private worry.

Mervyn, it seemed, had been leading an idle and futile kind of life, and getting mixed up with a set of fast young people, who seemed to dance by night—if nothing worse—and sleep by day. His father knew nothing of these adventures except when he had to pay Mervyn’s fines for exceeding the speed limit—generally in Kingston—and his debts for various items of expenditure, upon which Mervyn was exceedingly vague. There was one item, for instance, for a pearl necklace, and another for a diamond bangle with a wrist-watch, which demanded more explanation than Mervyn deigned to provide. It was his affair, he said. The lady’s name needn’t be dragged into any squalid discussion with his father. She was quite respectable, and very charming.

Southlands smiled with a certain grim humour when he repeated this conversation.

“I’m prepared to overlook that sort of thing,” he said. “I played the fool a bit myself at his age, though I didn’t go so far as pearl necklaces and diamond wrist-watches. What I can’t forgive is his absolute refusal to come into my office and learn

to manage the business which I have built up by a life-time of hard work. He says he has no interest in business life and would rather die than crease his trousers under an office desk. He talks of setting up as a teacher of dancing. Dancing, by God!" Southlands gave a harsh, ironical laugh.

"Oh, he's leg-pulling," I said, "you mustn't take him seriously, old man!"

He breathed heavily, and I saw the lines darken under his eyes.

"I must take him seriously," he said gloomily. "He has won putty medals or something for the Tango and he's bewitched by this devilish jazz or what he calls the 'divine rhythm of syncopated life'—some nonsensical phrase of the sort. There's some woman at the bottom of it I believe—one of those dancing hussies."

"It's a passing adventure," I said. "Mervyn is a bit of a humorist, and very young."

My brother-in-law shook his head and sighed deeply.

"At his age I was married to your sister. I was a qualified engineer and helping to control my father's business—ship-yards, collieries, steel works. 'Anthony Wingfield and Son'—with the son taking a responsible share. For twenty years I was as hard worked as any of the paid clerks, and punched the clock every morning with the most junior member of the firm. I liked my job. It was a great adventure in which I put all my quality of character—to the last ounce. I had thousands of men dependent upon my judgment—to some extent, anyhow—for their well-being and their wages. We treated them well. We tried to improve their social conditions and give them a fair deal. Even now, in spite of all this Bolshevism, they respect the name of Wingfield. . . . How will they respect it, do you think, when I die and Mervyn succeeds me? That dancer of jazz? That flippant and decadent young man who plays about with half-clad ladies and doesn't care a curse about his father's business or the economic state of England. It's that kind of thing which makes for revolution. It's that indifference to duty and responsibility which almost excuses revolution. I would be a Socialist to-morrow if I were a working man, knowing that the fruits of my toil went to buy diamond bracelets

for expensive sluts, and to provide elegant young slackers in vicious idleness."

That was pretty strong speech from Southlands, and I could see the bitterness of the man, the grief that lay heavy on his mind, the profound disappointment that he felt about his son. I had a good deal of sympathy with him, though I liked Mervyn and believed that, underneath all his flippancy, there was a good nature and decent code.

"Have you talked to him frankly," I asked, "in a comradely way—not so much as father to son as one friend to another? It pays sometimes to drop authority and appeal to commonsense. Intolerance is what these young people of to-day resent most of all, I think."

He seemed stung by that, and laughed bitterly.

"Have I ever been intolerant? Good heavens! Looking back on things now, I curse my weak good-nature. I've always spoilt Mervyn. At school he had more pocket-money than any other boy. During the holidays—war-time holidays—we tired ourselves out, Helen and I, in providing amusements for him and taking him to theatres, music-halls, concerts, any kind of show, to keep him from being bored or brooding over the war. We were worried and anxious because he was always bored. Nothing that we could do ever seemed to please him or give him any joy. He was cynical before he left school, blasé before he came down from Oxford. We spoilt him utterly, and are now reaping the harvest of our folly. He's a disgrace to my name and the business which I have built up by a life-time of toil. He's not only letting me down badly, he's letting down England, like so many of its younger men."

Southlands stood with his back to my fireplace, with his hands clasped behind him. In his black morning-coat and striped trousers he looked typical of his class, as one of the new peers, the business lords of England, alert, stern, hard, unimaginative. I had always ridiculed him a little because of his simplicity of mind, a touch of pomposity, a narrowness of view, a rather Jingo kind of patriotism. During the war I thought of him as one of our profiteers, making lots of money out of the massacre of youth. And yet as I looked at him now I could not help acknowledging that it was men of his

type who had built up the prosperity of England and men of his character whom we needed most, perhaps, to get us out of the trough of business depression into which we had fallen. I contrasted him in my mind with his son Mervyn, that good-looking, humorous, cynical young man who was the leader of the Society of Glad Young Things and deeply contemptuous of his father's moral platitudes and business ideals. Of the two types, the father was the better man beyond any doubt.

Southlands spoke again, after some moments of introspection and gloom.

"I didn't come here to talk about Mervyn. It's Lettice that is causing me most alarm, and, to be quite honest, I'm rather peeved with you for leading her astray. To put it bluntly, I'm dashed annoyed."

"With me?" I exclaimed, with a gasp of surprise. "You accuse me of leading Lettice astray? Come now, that's going rather too far, even for a brother-in-law!"

I laughed, with a kind of angry incredulity. It was too preposterous, considering that I had not seen the lady Lettice for several weeks, and that always I took a high tone with her and warned her of impending doom.

"She's always spending the night here," said my brother-in-law rather brusquely. "She slips up to town from Southlands, and when her mother questions her, she suggests that she has been going round with you and sleeping in this flat after late hours at night clubs and so forth. It seems to me rather lacking in—well—good form, to say the least of it, even though you're her mother's brother."

"She says that, does she?" I remarked, rather thoughtfully. "Well, it has happened once or twice."

It had happened twice—months ago. And it was not I who went around with her to night clubs, but Jocelyn first and then Tremayne. She had come in and coaxed me to give her a shake-down, and it was I who slept on the sofa, as a self-sacrificing uncle. As I thought over the matter, I had a sudden chill down my spine. It looked rather as if my lady Lettice had been lying to her mother. It rather looked as though she had something to hide and the need of an alibi.

I had stared at Southlands angrily, and there was a hasty

repudiation of Lettice's suggestion on the tip of my tongue, but then something in my brother-in-law's eyes, a kind of fear, a look of dreadful doubt, silenced me. Did he too suspect that Lettice had been lying to him and that she had used my name as a convenient camouflage? For his sake I dared not give her away. He would break his heart—this middle-class man who had been made a peer for heavy contributions to party funds, this type of business success, this hard, narrow-minded, stupid man, as I had thought him—he would be stricken if Lettice as well as Mervyn let him down. She was everything in life to him now.

"Isn't it true?" he asked, with a sudden alarm in his voice.

"Oh, it's true," I said. "I'm sorry if you disapprove. It hasn't happened often."

"I disapprove of it intensely," he said. "She has her own home. She has heaps of married friends if she wishes to spend a night in town."

"It's her spirit of adventure," I said. "She's a wild wood nymph, with a laughing heart. As innocent as a child and chaste as a lily."

I spoke lightly, though my voice was not quite steady, I think I was in an abject state of dread lest Lettice, that exquisite niece of mine, so beautiful and so gay, should be adventuring in dark forests whence there is no escape from the foul fiends which lie in wait for reckless ladies.

"My dear old man," said my brother-in-law, forgetting his rudge against me, "things are all wrong now-a-days. Unless we get back to religion, and the old obedience to duty, I can't see what's going to save us from moral collapse. I've been reading that article by Elizabeth Pomeroy's brother—that Bishop. He's perfectly right. England is on the merry road to ruin. Everybody, in every class, is in pursuit of pleasure—all this sport—running riot as though nothing else matters. Everybody wants to work less for more wages. Young people don't want to work at all, unless it's forced upon them by cruel fate, as they think. The working classes want to be subsidised and supported, for a minimum of service. Meanwhile our trade returns are staggering in their gravity. Exports are down by millions all along the line. Our heavy industries can hardly keep going for

lack of orders. My own firm is barely holding out against all these adverse conditions. If there's anything like a prolonged strike—they talk about a general strike in May!—I shudder to think of its economic consequences. Have we all gone mad, or bad? Have we lost our moral fibre? I honestly believe that Bolshevism has taken possession of our people—a moral Bolshevism, a spirit of anarchy in the mind of the younger generation—the Mervyns and Lettices of Mayfair and the mean streets of life.”

He spoke with a greater gift of words than I had ever heard on his lips. Emotion inspired him with unusual eloquence. I felt that I had misjudged the depths of his intelligence and quality of mind. And yet, as an old-fashioned Liberal, as a man believing firmly in the character of English democracy as I had seen it in the war—long-suffering, heroic, very noble—I could not accept his pessimistic prophecies, his mournful summing up of our state and time. Nor could I subscribe to his condemnation of the younger crowd with absolute agreement. They were adventurous, reckless, pleasure-loving, but with many splendid qualities. I began to tell him so, while he listened moodily, but suddenly the thought of Lettice with her false alibi in these rooms of mine, and of Mervyn refusing to go into his father's business, checked my platitudes and words of comfort. I faltered, did not finish my last sentence, felt a sudden chill of despondency and doubt.

“We have lost our old gods,” said my brother-in-law. “They have toppled from their pedestals. It was the war, of course, that overthrew them.”

“God help us all!” I said. “The unknown God, old man.”

“Yes,” said Southlands gravely. “It's our only chance.”

Then he smiled grimly, at some secret thought.

“Isn't God out of date nowadays? Hasn't the spirit of Jazz taken the place of the spirit of Jesus? So I am given to understand.”

He took up his silk hat and gloves which lay on my table and stared down at the carpet before taking his leave.

“Well, I'm glad to have got this off my chest. Very kind of you to listen to such gloom. . . . When you see Lettice, don't let her think that I have been spying on her, or anything

like that. She's old enough to have her own friends and so on. No doubt her mother and I worry unduly."

He nodded to me and left my room, and when he had gone I gave a groan which was half a laugh, but not mirthful.

"What has Lettice been up to?" I asked aloud. "I shall have to talk to her like a Dutch uncle . . ."

But I was only an English uncle, timid in the presence of adventurous nieces who listened with a smiling mockery to his words of wisdom.

XXX

I MET Mistress Lettice in Kensington Gardens when I was giving my wire-haired terrier an afternoon run and a smell of the squirrels who were Elizabeth's friends. He regarded them as unsportsmanlike little beasts for taking to the trees and laughing at him when he was close on their tails. "Surely," I thought, "that is my alluring niece, who has been keeping me awake o' nights with most unpleasant doubts!"

She was sitting under the trees with Ivo Tremayne, smoking a cigarette as usual through her long tube. She had taken off her hat and dropped it on the grass by her side, and her frock was a spring song, or rather, because of its brevity, a sonnet, in blue. The sunlight of an afternoon in March with a sudden false pretence of fair weather between snow storms and gales twinkled on her long silk stockings. She was a pretty picture there under the brown old trees, and Shepperson's pencil would have drawn her with long delicate lines as the type of post-war girl. Ivo Tremayne was sitting by her side, with his hat at the back of his head, leaning forward a little and prodding the turf at his feet with the ferrule of his stick. They were not talking to each other. Something in their attitude, their silence, gave me the idea that they had been quarrelling and were annoyed with each other. Lettice was staring towards the Round Pond with a smile about her lips, not caused, I think, by the group of boys sailing their boats there with noisy shouts. My wire-haired terrier recognised her as a gracious friend who had fed him in my rooms on chocolate biscuits and other forbidden luxuries. He went up and wagged his tail very politely.

"Hullo!" said Lettice. "There's my adorable Toby. Toby, Toby boy! . . . I suspect an uncle in the offing."

She saw me coming towards her and waved her cigarette-holder.

Tremayne rose and said, "Take my chair, sir. It will save you twopence in these hard times. The ticket collector won't notice the change of identity, and I'm just off to do a spot of work."

"Very kind of you," I answered. "But I don't want to butt in at all. Old age knows its place."

Tremayne grinned, and looked down at Lettice.

"So we meet at eight?"

"Eightish," she said. "Don't be like a bear with a sore head if I keep you waiting as usual. I like my friends to be very patient and well-behaved."

"Oh, you tame them," said Tremayne. "They feed out of your hand."

"You can go, Ivo," said Lettice. "Do not stand upon the order of your going."

She held out the back of her hand to him, like a princess, and said, "Quite clean."

He touched it with his lips and then laughed, and, with a nod to me, strode off through the trees, towards Queen's Gate, and I looked after him, admiring his fine, easy swing and straight back and long legs. "A good type," I thought, "clean-looking, honest. There's something in blood and breeding, whatever one may think about democracy."

"A nice fellow," I remarked to Lettice. "If one may judge from appearances, which may be wrong."

"Not wrong," she told me. "Ivo's all right. My best friend."

"Your lover?" I asked bluntly.

Her eyelashes fluttered for a moment, and she turned her head to me, looking amused.

"If I let him be."

I thought over that answer, and found it too cryptic. I asked another question, in a casual way.

"Up in town for the night, Lettice?"

She nodded and stooped to pat Toby.

"Yes. I slipped away from Southlands this afternoon. Ivo and I are doing a dinner and a show to celebrate his sale of a second-hand Daimler. It's my commission on the deal. I introduced him to the customer, poor dupe!"

"Good business," I remarked. "Where are you putting up for the night?"

Lettice hesitated a moment before replying.

"With a friend," she told me. "Why all this cross-questioning, Nunky?"

I was a coward before that girl's eyes, so frank and challenging. I had half a mind to avoid the issue and dodge an unpleasant duty. It was quite a minute, I should say, before I had the pluck to say the things that had been nagging in my brain since that talk with her father. She guessed by that silence of mine, and perhaps a change of colour that I felt creeping under my skin, that I had something on my mind.

"Look here," I said, "you and I have been good friends, Lettice, haven't we?"

"Comrades!" she answered graciously.

"I have the right to speak frankly to you, haven't I?"

"Why not?" asked my niece.

"I mean because of friendship," I said, "not because I'm your uncle, or in any position of authority—which you wouldn't admit."

"Be perfectly frank!" said Lettice. "Though I can't guess what it's all about."

"Can't you?" I asked, rather grimly. "Doesn't it occur to you that you've been making use of my name and address as an alibi for adventures elsewhere when you've come up from Southlands to spend the night in town? Hardly fair of you, my dear. You've put me into an awful hole with your father and mother. Not that I mind that. I haven't given you away. But I want to ask you—for my peace of mind's sake—why it was necessary to suggest that you have been using my rooms for your lodging-house?"

Lettice raised her eyebrows, and then laughed with real amusement.

"So that's it!" she said. "Father has been uttering dark suspicions. Poor old daddy! I had no idea that he was worrying about things of that sort. I thought trade depression was his cause of gloom."

"My dear!" I said. "My dear! Tell me there is no truth in his dark suspicions. They're mine too. I'm terribly wor-

ried about you. You see, you have been hiding the truth of things. Why? Why?"

Lettice lit another cigarette, deliberately, shielding the flame of the match in the cup of her hands.

"Yes," she said, "I camouflaged a little once or twice with mother and daddy. Twice, to be exact. Not more than that, Nunky, and then because they wouldn't have understood the truth if I had told them. They simply fail to understand, poor dears! It's no use expecting them to. They were brought up so differently. There's such a gap between their time and mine."

She laughed again, as though amused and a little pitiful because of this unbridgeable gap between the old and the young.

"Do you think I could understand?" I asked humbly.

Her long eyelashes fluttered again, and she looked at me in a smiling, inquisitive way, as though measuring up my capacity for understanding—a little doubtful of it, but not certain.

"You're a novelist," she said. "You study the psychology of people. You're wonderfully sympathetic for your time of life. I've half a mind to put you to the test."

"Try me," I said. "I *want* to understand. Badly."

"As a father confessor," she said. "In strict confidence, so help me God!"

She made an imaginary slash across her throat with her forefinger, in schoolboy style.

"Word of honour," I assured her.

"Well, it's like this," she said. "Twice—not more than twice, uncle!—I lost the last train back to Southlands. I lost it each time by something like two hours, owing to agreeable company and the adventure of life. Do you bet as far as that?"

"All the way," I said. "I was young once myself, when time didn't seem to matter, when it flew by on silent wings."

"Exactly," said Lettice. "And most beautifully put! . . . Well, there I was alone in London, so to speak, though surrounded by charming people, and Ivo Tremayne."

"Always Ivo?" I remarked.

"Nearly always," she admitted. "He's very loyal!"

"And so, being alone in London——?"

"At two in the morning," said Lettice, "and without even a handbag or pair of pyjamas, it's very difficult for a lady of my years and appearance. One can't sleep on the Thames Embankment. At least—one could, but the seats are hard, I'm told, and bobbies flash their bull's-eyes on you and say 'Move along there. You mustn't sleep 'ere, you know!'"

"You have heaps of girl friends," I reminded her. "I suppose you slipped in with one of them. Why make a mystery about it to your father and mother?"

"Girl friends are such a nuisance sometimes," said Lettice. "They have their own fathers and mothers and husbands and other drawbacks at two in the morning!"

"What then?" I asked. "A hotel? Very indiscreet."

Lettice glanced sideways at me again.

"We're coming to the exciting bit," she said. "I wonder if you *will* understand? I mean, the modern point of view, the mind of people of my generation, the things which don't bother us at all?"

"Tell me," I said, and I hid the anxiety in my voice.

"It was all perfectly simple," said Lettice. "Ivo has three jolly rooms over in mews in Knightsbridge. One climbs up to them by an outside staircase like a ladder. They're furnished like ship's cabins—everything as neat as a new pin—and some rather good etchings on the walls. Ivo sleeps in the inner room, looking out on to a blank wall, and rather stuffy. Of course he gave me the best bedroom—six foot by eight—looking on to the mews, which gets more air and light, though it's noisy in the morning, when the chauffeurs begin their cleaning up—swishing down the cars, whistling, shouting to the brats."

"You slept there?" I asked, and in my own soul I said, "Good God! Good God!"

"Twice," said Lettice. "It was great fun. I borrowed a pair of Ivo's pyjamas and looked like Peter Pan. In the morning I helped him to cook breakfast. Poached eggs on toast, and perfectly done on an oil stove. Like a picnic in the heart of London. . . . Only, of course, I couldn't tell mother

or father. They simply *wouldn't* have understood. Don't you agree?"

I spoke the words that had been in my heart.

"Good God!" I said in a low voice. "Good God!"

"No," said Lettice, looking at me regretfully, "I thought even you wouldn't understand. It's that gap again. There's no bridge across it. Post-war and pre-war. They fail to meet. It's very unfortunate."

I was silent for what must have seemed a long time. Lettice was petting my dog, which had an ecstatic look on its face when she fondled its ears.

"My dear," I said, "you young people seem able to talk frankly about things which we of an older generation used to hush up. Tell me—is it innocence or ignorance that makes you so different from us? You say we don't understand. But do *you* understand—the meaning of life, the passions of men, the weakness of women? What about Ivo? Is he an archangel or a disembodied spirit? When a girl comes to his rooms alone, to spend the night there, is he beyond temptation to put his arms about her, to make love in the usual way, to take advantage of his opportunities? Do you *understand*, or are you utterly ignorant of the frightful risk?"

Lettice looked at me quite frankly, and answered with the utmost simplicity.

"There's nothing we don't understand, uncle. But you exaggerate the risk. There's no risk if the girl is decent and the boy is well brought up by his sisters and girl friends. It depends entirely on the girl. There are a lot of little sluts about—oh, I know that!—but not so many as you think. Some of the boys are decadent and nasty, but not many. Those I know are awfully simple and clean. We go about together anywhere, at any time, without getting worried because we belong to different sexes. It doesn't bother us. Or if it does, now and then, a girl can always make a man understand that she's not one of those—the bad ones. We don't bother. We're free of all the nastiness that used to poison people's minds, from what I read in books and hear from darling mother. Why shouldn't I sleep in Ivo's rooms? He's as careful of me as an elder brother, and far more considerate. He wouldn't

do anything to hurt me for anything in the world. He's a gentleman and nice-minded. Good heavens! What a fuss you old-fashioned people make about that sort of thing. We don't worry about it, and get a lot of fun. . . . See?"

"It's terrifying!" I exclaimed. "You make me tremble in every limb."

She turned to me with mild surprise.

"Why terrifying?" she asked. "Don't you think it's rather splendid? Aren't you sorry you were born before the new order of things?"

"I don't believe in it," I said. "I find it impossible to believe. Lettice, my dear, I implore you not to do such a thing again. Give me that promise. For God's sake, and your father's sake!"

Lettice laughed, with a touch of scorn, and shook her head.

"Nothing doing, uncle. No promises. Your laws are not my laws. Ivo and I are perfectly sure with each other. We could be in a desert together and carry on—as brother and sister. We *have* been in a desert together—this desert of London—in that mews of his."

I became angry with her quite suddenly.

"It's abominable," I told her. "You admitted that he would be your lover, if you let him be."

"I don't let him be," she said calmly. "We've talked it all out quite quietly. Just before you came up, as a matter of fact. He said, 'What about letting me fall in love with you, Letty?' He said he felt like it and would be delighted to put his heart at my feet as a doormat or anything I liked to do with it."

She spoke with a fair imitation of Ivo's manner.

"And your answer?" I asked.

Lettice seemed amused with the answer she had given.

"He was rather peeved about it, poor man. I told him I liked him as a dancing partner, admired him as one of the world's workers, in a small way of business, and trusted him beyond the speed limit. But as a husband I should tire of him. His ideas are too conventional. He gets them all from the *Morning Post* and the leading articles of the *Daily Mail*. Besides, as I told him gently but firmly, I may care to spend

a night now and then in the rooms above the mews, but I'd hate to spend a life-time there."

"The man's a blackguard!" I exclaimed. "He ought to be horse-whipped. How dare he let you go to his rooms like that? If you are innocent or careless, he has no right to let you risk your honour."

"Old-fashioned words, uncle, and quite unfair," said Lettice calmly. "Ivo didn't want me to stay in his rooms, not because he thought it wrong but because he thought of all you old-fashioned people. 'They won't understand,' he said. 'We ought to be careful,' he said, 'because everybody of middle age is so extremely suspicious of our innocent little ways.' I climbed up the ladder and said '*J'y suis, j'y reste.*' After that there was no argument, because he couldn't chuck me down again, could he? You see all that, don't you?"

I saw, and groaned so loudly that I startled an old gentleman pacing under the trees and letting the March wind play upon his baldness as he carried his hat in his hand.

"Try to understand, Nunky," said Lettice in a gracious, pitying way. "Try to catch up with modernity. Try to rid yourself of all those dark suspicions and sinister ideas, which must be very unpleasant to have about one and are perfectly absurd. On my word of honour, Nunky, perfectly absurd."

"Where are you going to spend the night?" I asked sternly.

She put her head on one side, laughing at me through the half-curved lashes.

"What would you say if I told you that I'm going to lose the last train again and climb up Ivo's ladder?"

"I should say you were a shameless little slut!" I exclaimed hotly.

"Shameless, but not a slut, uncle," she answered. "I'm shameless because I don't believe in shame when there's no reason to be ashamed. My little conscience is as white as snow."

"Lettice!" I said excitedly. "Think of your father's name. His love. Do you want to break his heart?"

"Dear old daddy!" she said, with a sudden tenderness. "I love every hair on his head. But I'm not in the nursery any longer."

"What would Jocelyn say?" I asked. "That boy worships the ground you walk on. You've embittered him already by your wild ways, your philandering, your carelessness of his boyish passion."

"Oh, Jocelyn!" said Lettice, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "Since he's gone Bolshie we don't move in the same circles. His friends distress me. I dislike his politics."

"You let him kiss you once," I reminded her reproachfully. "You played about with him, and then left him in the lurch. Is that the modern idea of loyalty and fair play?"

Lettice smiled thoughtfully at the lolling tongue of Toby.

"One day," she said, "I may let him kiss me again. You never can tell! It's rather nice being kissed by Jocelyn, I will say that. If he hadn't gone wrong on Labour, I might encourage the lad."

She spoke with a mockery which ignored my anger, my distress, my fear.

But suddenly, with a swift change of mood, she put her hand on my arm, and spoke less teasingly.

"Don't look so worried! I'm not doing anything naughty. I'm only very much amused with life, and quite able to take care of myself. All those things I told you are perfectly true. There's nothing to worry about, really and truly!"

"My dear!" I said, "My dear! I'm your mother's brother. Think of her a little. Her anxieties, her prayers, her secret tears."

"No need for tears," she said.

She laughed again, and yet I think my words touched her at last. She looked at me, playfully.

"As you make such a fuss about it, little uncle, I won't climb up that ladder to-night! I'll stay at Aunt Elizabeth's, if that will help you to sleep in peace."

"Thank God!" I said fervently. "Thank God for that, Lettice."

"You've been a nice, kind uncle," said Lettice. "I owe you something. But you're very old-fashioned! . . . Do you mind walking towards a taxi!"

We walked towards a taxi along the Kensington Road and she kissed her hand to me as she drove off.

XXXI

FRANK HARDY and I were becoming very good friends. I made a habit of slipping round to his bed-sitting-room in Raphael Street on evenings, now and then, when he was not sleeping at Elizabeth's house, and he seemed glad—perhaps he was only patient—to have my company and conversation. He made tea for me on his gas-stove and we sat talking and smoking sometimes until after midnight. He was older than those young people who regarded me as one of the old fogeys. As a man who had been through the war, there was a common tie of understanding between us, and indeed, more often than not, we talked of the old war days for hours, reviving memories of places in Flanders and on the Somme which had no meaning at all for the Mervyns and Jocelyns of the post-war period. I did not feel so old with Frank. He shared my perplexities about the younger crowd and the future of England. He knew more than I did about social conditions and thoughts stirring in the under-world, and was very liberal and open-minded, and yet a gentleman of the old school, if I may use that phrase for so young a man—thirty-two or thereabouts—with allegiance to the old code of chivalry and public-school tradition, exempt from its snobbishness because of sympathy with the under-dogs and painful experience as one of them for a time. I liked his loyalty—he was absurdly grateful to me for small services—and his quiet unselfishness—natural and unaffected—and his indifference to poverty. I think in a quiet way he had dedicated himself to the spirit of sacrifice and service, so that he might do a bit of good to fellows down on their luck, and help on, in a humble way, the chance of peace. That is why he was pleased about his job with Elizabeth. It gave him the kind of work he wanted, helping to superintend her night refuge—he took charge there sometimes—and going down to

her club in Walworth, to play dominoes with young men, to teach them boxing, and now and again to lead their debates, and to keep order when political arguments made them abuse each other in unparliamentary language. He had become really keen about Elizabeth's League of Youth and was roping in some of the younger set, including Jocelyn and David Swayne, with whom he was on the best of terms.

Once or twice I tempted him away from Elizabeth, by the offer of a job in a publishing office where he would earn more than Elizabeth could afford to pay him. But he was not keen to change, and that vision of six pounds a week did not appeal to him irresistibly.

"I might be tempted, if I could set up housekeeping with Nancy on something like equal terms," he said. "But the difference isn't big enough to make that possible, and meanwhile I'm making myself useful to Miss Pomeroy, and having a wonderfully good time."

I contrasted his idea of "a wonderfully good time" with that of my nephew Mervyn and others of his type, who would have sickened at the sight of his bed-sitting-room in Raphael Street and groaned at the thought of all his drudgery.

He was immensely taken with Jocelyn, partly, perhaps, because Jocelyn was Nancy's brother, but also because he had more belief than I had in the sincerity and quality of that young man.

"Isn't he rather a *poseur*?" I asked. "Isn't he playing a game with all this Labour stuff, because he has a kind of complex about his father's intolerance and thinks it rather a social jest?"

Frank shook his head—and smiled.

"There's more in it than that. He's really out to find the truth of things. Underneath his sense of humour and his pose of cynicism, there's a keen mind trying to get at the meaning of life. He doesn't give himself away much, but I've been watching him a good deal."

"What do you find?" I asked.

"I can see his father in him all the time," said Frank—"that Die-hard Bishop with his passion for truth. It's extraordinary! They're as like as two pins sometimes, only at

opposite poles of thought. Jocelyn is searching for Christ, strange as it may seem."

"You astonish me!" I said. "He wears his mask pretty well."

Frank had seen underneath the mask, he thought, once or twice. He was persuaded that Jocelyn was touched with a sense of social injustice because he was sensitive to the unfair deal of life's opportunities. He was a bit of a visionary, thought Frank, like one of those young Russian aristocrats who, before the war, abandoned their father's rank and wealth and went down among the peasants or factory hands to live the simple life as a kind of sacrifice. Tolstoy's 'Resurrection,' and all that. That was why Jocelyn was digging in with David Swayne, somewhere down the Vauxhall Bridge Road, and keeping company with ill-dressed young democrats and half-baked idealists.

"He wants to find out if they hold the keys of heaven," said Frank, "and he's getting disappointed because so many of them talk abject nonsense and merely gibber in terms of class hatred and social jealousy. Well, he's cured of our Red Revolutionists. Did I tell you that Ruth Windle has been setting her cap at him and trying to catch him in the folds of her Red Flag?"

He told me then, reminding me of "that frightful woman," as he called her, who lived on the first floor of his lodging-house in Raphael Street—that reddish-haired lady who had broken up Elizabeth's meeting of the League of Youth.

Jocelyn had met her on the stairs several times when he had been calling on Frank. Once she stopped him and gave him one of her little pamphlets. A few days later she blocked his way up the staircase by sitting on one of the stairs with her hands clasped round her knees and arguing with him about the cowardice and folly of moderate Labour. It appeared that she knew David Swayne and had seen Jocelyn about with that young man and found out his name as the son of the Bishop of Burham from one of her friends.

"You must join our ranks," she said. "You are only wasting your time with those Labour Hypocrites. We should be glad to have you as one of our recruits."

"Very charming of you," said Jocelyn, as Frank overheard from his half-opened door on the landing above. "As it happens, I don't believe in Red Revolution. I'm a man of peace."

"Peace!" cried Ruth Windle scornfully. "Is there any peace possible when the world is dominated by bloody-minded militarists holding power by armies and police and arranging a new war worse than the last? We must destroy before we can begin to build. We must overthrow the enemies of the people before the kingdom of God is established on earth. There are many devils about—the horned beasts of the Apocalypse. Capitalists! Trusts! Bloated Millionaires! Blood-suckers!"

"Well," said Jocelyn politely, and with a good-natured laugh, "I daresay there are some very unpleasant people about. I've met a few of them. But I dislike blood and terror as a philosophy of life, and meanwhile I want to go upstairs and see a friend of mine."

She detained him by sheer obstruction until he had promised to attend one of her meetings in the room downstairs. She promised him a revelation of truth which would open his eyes to many hidden things. Frank warned him against going, but his curiosity was piqued.

"I've never met the Reds," he said. "Not the real 'scarlet-runners.' I'd like to have a look at 'em. I have an idea they'll be rather amusing."

"A poisonous crowd," said Frank. "Cankered little souls. And very dangerous, old lad."

Jocelyn pooh-poohed the danger, and was quite amused. He described his evening to Frank afterwards with a good deal of detail. Ruth Windle was a sort of high priestess of the occasion, dressed in that green silk slip which she seemed to fancy in conjunction with her read hair. She received the members of the Communist group and collected sixpence a head for the party funds. A Red Flag was unfurled at one end of the room in which a number of cane chairs were arranged below a raised dais made of sugar boxes covered inadequately with red baize. Above this, on the end wall, were portraits of Karl Marx with his cotton-wool beard and Lenin with his slant eyes.

The crowd who came in were made up of anæmic-looking young men—who wore their hair rather long and their collars rather low, so that they showed a considerable amount of neck—accompanied by young women with closely-cropped hair and moody eyes. Jocelyn guessed, without sufficient evidence, that they came from the outer suburbs like Stratford and Walthamstow and Gidea Park, at the far end of 'bus journeys which he had never taken—those vast, mysterious districts of London whose seething populations dwell in mean streets for no apparent purpose of God or man. They looked rather startled and hostile when Jocelyn appeared among them in clothes which seemed to him perfectly ordinary but to them appeared to be a challenge of social superiority, shocking to their ideals of human equality. Some of the young women glared at him quite fiercely, he said. Ruth Windle introduced him to her brother, an unhealthy-looking fellow with dark, deep-set, eyes and untidy hair, and dirty finger-nails.

"Glad to see you," he said to Jocelyn, holding out a damp, limp hand. "You'll hear the real thing to-night. No bourgeois rubbish such as you get at Labour meetings, where the speakers measure their words in case there's a policeman with a notebook, and pretend to be passionate for social reform when all they want is a well-paid job. We're out for revolution in this little crowd. And no kid-glove stuff either. We take our cue from Moscow."

"Does Moscow pay well?" asked Jocelyn, in a friendly way.

Ruth Windle's brother blinked at this question and glanced round nervously. When he answered, he lowered his voice.

"It's hard to get money out of the Soviet Republic," he said. "Of course they finance some of our propaganda—otherwise we couldn't produce it—but it's very irregular. I'm in debt to the printers as it is."

"That's awkward," said Jocelyn.

"Devilish awkward," said his Bolshevik friend.

He kept his voice on its low pitch, and spoke confidentially.

"Of course there's a lot of money creeping in from Moscow in one way and another. Paid agents, local agitators, shop-stewards, and so on. It's quite expensive when it all tots up.

But they're very sharp about accounts. You can't run a revolution on twopence ha'penny."

"No," said Jocelyn, in a non-committal way. "I suppose not."

He was rather excited at getting behind the scenes of Red Revolution in England. It seemed to him extraordinarily like something he had read in Dickens' novels—Simon Tappertit and his fellow conspirators. Several times in the course of the evening he wanted to laugh aloud, and had great difficulty in keeping a straight face.

Ruth Windle came over to him again with glad tidings.

"We have one of our leading spirits here to-day. Comrade Chick, the Trade Union leader. He's an honorary member of the Third International—the real thing, you know—and he's been in prison three times for sedition. That was after his visits to Moscow, when he saw the Master face to face and had long talks with him."

"What master?" asked Jocelyn, rather mystified.

"Lenin," she said in a hushed voice, as though speaking of God.

It was Mr. Chick who was the orator of the evening, but here were long delays before his speech, while he sat on the dais next to Ruth Windle—a little slit-eyed man with hunched shoulders and a furtive expression. Ruth Windle opened the proceedings by unfurling the Red Flag—while the young men and women rose and sang the song dedicated to that symbol of blood and terror. They sang it with a religious fervour, but no fine ear for music. Then the lady made an address of welcome to Comrade Chick, who sat biting his finger-nails and looking bored while the speaker described the immense honour that had been conferred upon them all by this visit from a man whose wonderful courage, immense activity, and powerful brain were advancing the Communist cause by leaps and bounds. He was a shining example to all loyal comrades.

"Here is a man," said Ruth Windle, warming up in her oratory, "who has already been martyred three times in the brutal prisons of our Capitalist tyrants, whose missionary zeal has carried him to the uttermost parts of the earth—far from Poplar and West Ham—whose spirit of sacrifice exalts him as

one of the saints and heroes of our Communist faith. I call here and now for three hearty cheers for Comrade Chick."

She herself led the cheers with a shrill "Hip, hip, hooray!"

Comrade Chick continued to bite his finger-nails, while Herbert Windle rose to read the minutes of the last meeting and to run through the accounts of this Communist group. Jocelyn remembered various items of expenditure:

Printing and paper—One hundred and twenty pounds.

Hire of typist for four weeks—Six pounds.

Office boy at local Headquarters—Six shillings a week.
and

Three shillings loss from petty cash.

One Red Flag—the old one destroyed by University cads in Hyde Park—fifteen shillings.

Secret service in barracks and factories—four pounds ten shillings.

It was Jocelyn's opinion, after listening to these accounts, that Red Revolution in England was being conducted on economical lines.

Finally Comrade Chick addressing the meeting, after clearing his throat and spitting into the fireplace at some distance from the dais.

"Dear comrades all," he began, but there was no love in his voice, no light of Christian charity in his slant eyes.

Jocelyn recalled only the gist of his speech. It was mostly a series of prophecies regarding a general strike due to begin on May the first of that year, when the Government subsidy of the mining industry came to an end. Capitalism, he said, would be made to tremble in its boots. The fat and self-complacent bourgeoisie, now lolling in its Rolls-Royces and Ford cars, careless of human life, not caring a damn indeed for the seething misery of the oppressed classes, would be made to blench before the terrors of a righteous revolution, striking in defence of liberty, equality and fraternity, acclaiming the sacred dictatorship of the proletariat, destroying the machinery and government of the Capitalist class. After May the first there would be a social hell in England, said Comrade Chick, if he and others like him had anything to do with the matter, as they certainly would. No trains would be running. London would

be plunged into abysmal darkness. Not a factory would be working in the land. Millions of men would stand idle in the market-place. Also at the street corners. Food would only be transported by permission of the Trades Union Council, acting with the advice of the Soviet Republic of Russia on behalf of World Revolution. Only comrades would get a bite to eat. The bloated bourgeoisie would find their bellies shrinking. They would squeal for the bread of life, and they wouldn't get it—not without surrender to the sacred dictatorship of the proletariat, as set up by soldiers' and workmen's councils under a central Soviet Committee, taking over the power of the Trades Union Congress. The cause of the miners, ill-paid, threatened with an attack on their standard of living, would be supported—to the death—by working men in every industry throughout the land. Communists from all the cells that had been established in workshops and factories would emerge from their lairs and lead the revolution. Comrade Chick himself would be in the forefront of the fray, and woe betide any man or woman who turned traitor in this time of reckoning. Needless to say—though Comrade Chick said it—there would be many cowards and many white-livered skunks who would do their best to play into the hands of reaction. The Labour Party—its name was received with groans from the audience—would prate of “constitutionalism”—that Fudge—and betray the cause of liberty as they always did and always would do. Its leaders would crawl before the Government and bow their heads, not three times but ninety times nine, before Conservative parasites, and lick their boots, and cry for peace and mercy, and come running round to the real leaders of Labour, the Communist chiefs, with offers of compromise, arbitration, agreement, and surrender.

“There won't be no agreement and no surrender,” said Comrade Chick. “This thing will be fought to a finish, even if we wade through rivers of blood and holocausts of murder. When that general strike begins I say, murder everything that stands in its way as an obstacle to victory. My watchword to all comrades is fight with the gloves off, and to hell with the Bourgeoisie. Long live the World Revolution!”

Jocelyn had watched the audience about him during this

speech. The anæmic young men had flushed faces. Their eyes burnt like coals. Some of them moistened their lips with their tongues as though the heat of this eloquence had scorched them. But according to Jocelyn there was a look of blue funk in the eyes of several of them when once he turned his head to look at the faces behind him. The women were the most enthusiastic. They sat forward on their chairs with their gaze fixed on Comrade Chick. They applauded violently by clapping hands. As he sat down they raised shrill cheers, and sprang to their feet excitedly when Ruth Windle waved the Red Flag over the head of the orator, and then, with a sudden dramatic touch, knelt down on one knee and kissed his right hand.

I laughed a good deal at this description of Red Revolution as given by Jocelyn to Frank Hardy, but there was an unpleasant little query at the back of my mind.

"It's all very well, Frank, but that sort of thing is rather disturbing. That money from Moscow, for instance, and that propaganda in workshops and mean streets. How far is it spreading, do you think? What effect is it going to have if that general strike happens in May—which God forbid?"

Frank was non-committal, and thought out his answer with slow puffs from a rather foul pipe.

"Hard to say. . . . There's a lot of this Red stuff about. . . . It seems to be favoured down Battersea way and across the river in Peckham and Camberwell. It's pretty hot in Poplar and West Ham. . . . I rather fancy, it hasn't touched the real working man—only the won't-works and the boys who hang round street corners looking for trouble. Of course all this unemployment is a pretty good breeding-ground for young anarchy. What can you expect?"

"I don't like the look of things," I said, and was not convinced by Frank's faith in the commonsense of English character.

"Well, we shall know in May," said Frank. ". . . How about a cup of tea? The kettle is singing its glad song."

He brewed me a cup of tea and we went on talking in that bed-sitting-room, which was a good place for conversation, though not luxurious.

XXXII

IT was about this time that Nancy Pomeroy came to town and took a flat for herself and Jocelyn in Church Street, Kensington. She could well afford to do so. That book of hers continued its triumphant progress on both sides of the Atlantic, and Nancy was a famous lady, much to her amusement and somewhat to her annoyance. Photographers lay in wait for her when she went out shopping with her good-looking brother, who was delighted to have her company again and chaffed her unceasingly for having produced such a notorious and licentious work as "The Foolish Virgin." Secretly he was very proud of her and thought the novel as innocent as a Hans Andersen fairy-tale. He persuaded her to accept an invitation to a dinner of literary celebrities given by a ladies' club which feeds these lions in marble halls, and she was distressed to find herself the chief guest of the evening and put down on the programme to answer the toast of "Literature." I happened to be there and saw the flutter of curiosity which passed through the assembled ladies when Nancy's name was announced to the hostess of the evening. Their invitations had been sent "to meet the author of 'The Foolish Virgin,'" and they had gathered in unusual numbers for that purpose, devoured with interest to see the very latest celebrity, whose book was talked about at every tea-table as the most daring and delightful study of the young idea. I overheard some of the remarks made by the ladies near me before Nancy appeared.

"Of course I enjoyed it vastly," said one of them. "So fresh and candid. But I suspect the author of it is one of those poisonous creatures who wallow in Freudian complexes. I expect she wears her hair like a boy and drinks three cocktails before dinner. Not my style, my dear."

"They say she's just a chit of a thing," said another lady, standing next to me. "In my opinion she ought to be whipped. Of course it's a clever novel—I admit that—but I don't care

for that particular form of cleverness. I'm keeping it out of the hands of Joan."

"Joan will get it all right," said the other darkly.

"She's probably one of those withered spinsters," said a young girl near me. "This club is stuffed with them. They tell objectionable stories in the smoking-room."

Nancy's photographs had been given a full page in the *Tatler*. Snap-shots of her had been published in other illustrated papers. But there were still many people who were unaware that the author of "The Foolish Virgin" was a young girl. Publicity has to be continuous and overwhelming to catch the eye of the modern world, distracted by so many claimants to the halls of fame.

Then Nancy came in, with Jocelyn, and was introduced to the leading ladies. She wore a simple white frock and her hair was looped over each ear in an old-fashioned style. There was a little furtive smile in her eyes, but she glanced nervously at Jocelyn and put her hand on his arm as though frightened by all these people staring at her and pressing round. For the author of a notorious novel, Nancy looked amazingly young, absurdly demure—like a school-girl at her first public dance, thrilled and shy.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed one of the ladies by my side. "A slip of a thing like that? Incredible!"

"Isn't she sweet?" exclaimed the lady next to her. "Lace and lavender. Like a little Jane Austen!"

I saw that I had been placed next to her at table, with Jocelyn on my other side. They did not see me, as I kept back from the press of inquisitive women until they took their places.

"Well, Nancy," I said, "how do you like being a famous lady?"

She was delighted, it seemed, to find a friend as her table companion, and gave a little cry of pleasure.

"I'm feeling frightfully shy," she whispered. "Do I have to drink out of all these glasses? If so, I fear the worst."

"It's her first public dinner," said Jocelyn. "If she takes my advice, it will be her last. Did you ever see such a collection of scraggy arms and prominent backbones? Disgusting, I call it."

Later on Nancy's face became as white as a sheet. It was when she was glancing at the *mênu*.

"They've put me down to speak!" she whispered, looking really terror-stricken. "I can't possibly. I would rather die."

"They ought to have let you know," I said. "Surely they gave you an opportunity of preparing something."

"They just asked me to dinner," said Nancy, and her lips trembled as though she were on the verge of tears. She looked across to Jocelyn and spoke to him in great agitation.

"Jocelyn! Before it's too late, can't we slip out without anybody noticing?"

"Hardly possible," said Jocelyn. "Everybody's staring at you. Pull yourself together, old girl. You'll feel better after a glass of champagne, though I expect it's sweet stuff and pretty foul."

"It's a pretty dirty trick, not letting you know beforehand," I said. "It's what they do in some of these women's clubs."

"Well, I *won't* speak!" said Nancy, tightening her lips like a school-girl rebelling against discipline. During dinner she couldn't eat a morsel of food, but just played about with her knife and fork.

Jocelyn tried to give her some brotherly comfort.

"You needn't make a long oration. Just get up and tell them any nonsense that comes into your head. This kind of crowd is quite unintelligent."

"I've nothing in my head," said Nancy. "It's a blank, Jocelyn!"

"Treat 'em like Sunday-school kids," said Jocelyn. "As long as you despise your audience you're master of it. Be satirical. Ask them if they ever buy the books they read or if they borrow them from the libraries and rob the author of his royalties. Say something nice about Shakespeare. Any rot will do. They haven't come to hear you. They just want to stare at you."

Nancy laughed in spite of her distress.

"They'll be dreadfully disappointed, poor dears."

She sat mute and disconsolate, glancing nervously at the company, crumbling the bread by the side of her plate.

"How's that noble father of yours?" I asked, trying to put her at her ease.

"Poor old daddy!" she answered. "He's frightfully worried about England and me. To say nothing of Jocelyn."

She hadn't lost her sense of humour, I found, nor her school-girl way of speech.

"Your Aunt Elizabeth tells me you've left home and taken a flat in Church Street, Kensington."

"Yes," she said. "I did a bunk from home. All the old ladies think I've libelled them. Father thinks I've disgraced his name. Things became a little hectic in that cathedral city. . . . Oh, I wish they hadn't put me down to speak!"

That dreadful duty haunted her all through a rather bad dinner. She sat blushing in vivid waves of colour when a famous author rose to propose the toast of "Literature," coupled with the name of Miss Nancy Pomeroy, author of "The Foolish Virgin," and proceeded to get off some very bright epigrams, which unfortunately I had heard before when the same famous author had made exactly the same speech two nights before at one of my own clubs. Then he paid a graceful tribute to "The Foolish Virgin," and said it had kept him out of bed all night, and had made him laugh so lightheartedly that his maidservant must have thought he was suffering from drink or delirium. But it had also made him shed a little tear or two—the first time for years—and he, like the great public of novel-readers, owed a debt of gratitude to Miss Pomeroy for her charming, exquisite, and delicate revelation of a young girl's mind in this post-war England of ours. The old authors would have to look to their laurels. Youth—young girlhood—had flung down the gauntlet, or rather, a pair of silk stockings, as a challenge to mortal combat with the ancient champions of the literary arena. And so forth—rather highfalutin' and fantastical.

"'Literature,' coupled with the name of Miss Nancy Pomeroy!" The toast was proposed and the company stood up raising their glasses to Nancy. She, too, rose, until I whispered to her to keep her place. Some of the ladies kissed their glasses to her. All the men were smiling at that shy, blushing, distressed-looking girl, still crumbling the bread beside her plate. They had read her book, and thought her a knowing little creature and rather "hot stuff."

The hostess of the evening, an ample lady with a lot of pink

flesh exuding from her frock, and bare brawny arms, smiled graciously at Nancy and said, "Miss Pomeroy will respond."

Jocelyn spoke to her in a low voice.

"Courage! Le diable est mort!"

Nancy slithered up from her chair, holding on to the back of it. Her face was white, but she screwed a smile about her lips. And in a simple, unaffected way she made quite a good little speech, with some pleasant touches of humour. Now and again I could hear a catch in her breath, as though she were struggling desperately for self-control, but I don't think the rest of the audience heard it. She described the penalties of publicity and the terrors of authorship. She would never have written a novel, she said, if she had known that photographers were such persistent men. They dogged her footsteps, they penetrated into private places. She had found one on the top of the garden wall. Then there were the interviewers, who asked her all sorts of questions which were quite difficult to answer. What did she think of marriage, for instance? Without experience she found it impossible to think of marriage. What did she think of Mr. Bernard Shaw? It was like being asked what she thought of the Sphinx. What were her opinions about the League of Nations? She had to go and ask her father what he thought, and it seemed to make him angry about the United States of America, which was rather unfortunate, because her interviewer was an American journalist and a very nice young man, educated at Harvard, so that she couldn't be unkind to him. . . . She was very sorry she had written "The Foolish Virgin." She begged everybody's pardon for that indiscretion, which she had just written to amuse herself.

She sat down with a little gasp of relief, and I put my hand on hers and said "Bravo! bravo! It couldn't have been better."

Jocelyn had been very nervous while she was speaking. I noticed that he had kept his eyes fixed on the table, never once looking at her, a faint smile on his lips.

He, too, gave a heavy sigh of relief when she sat down again. Then he leaned across to her and said, "Jolly good! . . . Perfectly marvellous! . . . We're a wonderful family!"

"Whatever did I say?" asked Nancy anxiously. "I can't

remember a single word I said. I wanted to sink through the floor."

The next time I saw the girl after that dinner was in Frank Hardy's rooms, at four o'clock one afternoon. I think I must have interrupted an emotional scene, for Frank looked extremely ill at ease and Nancy had very luminous eyes and was shy when I appeared. She left almost as soon as I arrived, as she was going to tea with Elizabeth, and Frank went downstairs with her and dallied on the doorstep, so that it was some minutes before he came back again, whistling nervously as though nothing had happened of a sentimental nature. But I knew him well enough to ask indiscreet questions.

"When are you going to marry the Foolish Virgin, Frank? She'll make a charming wife. You'll be able to type her novels and correct her grammar."

"She was good enough to suggest it," he admitted dryly, "though she didn't put it quite like that."

"Well, it's a good offer," I remarked.

He didn't seem to think so. He talked a lot of nonsense about not being worthy of her, as an odd-job man unable to keep his end up. He would have to go to her for pocket money. People would think he was sponging on her. Now that she had become a famous writer, he could only stand on the sidewalk as one of the crowd watching her pass, infinitely removed from him.

"Frank," I said, "you're a nice fellow in many ways, but you're also a silly ass, and I've no patience with you. That girl is yearning for you. What does money matter, or fame, or fiction by foolish virgins? You're chucking away love. It's the unpardonable sin against God and man."

He was as obstinate as a mule on a point of honour, which, to my mind, didn't exist.

XXXIII

IT was April and its treacherous winds that caused a crisis in the history of the Pomeroy family by killing off a corpulent but weak-lunged gentleman, Sir Robert Meggs, who was Conservative Member for South Walworth. This sudden death of an undistinguished politician who had gained his seat by subscribing heavily to local charities out of the profits of jam and pickles, which had made a fortune for him in the war—it was his plum and apple jam which had demoralised the troops in Flanders—caused a by-election in that constituency, and Jocelyn Pomeroy was nominated as Labour candidate, opposing the son of the late Member and a Liberal—Mr. Parfrement—who was a great authority on butterflies and moths, an earnest member of the League of Nations Union, and an advocate of Prohibition in England.

I had no interest at all in Mr. Parfrement, whose name and fame were previously unknown to me and who could do nothing but split votes without a dog's chance of victory—my old party was almost extinct as a fighting force—and I had no belief in the new jam-and-pickle baronet as a spiritual leader of English thought, in spite of his war service as a major in the A.S.C.; but this news about Jocelyn interested me considerably.

It was Herbert Bradshaw, ex-Cabinet Minister in the first Labour Government who, no doubt, had used his influence to get Jocelyn nominated for this election. He had taken a great fancy to my young friend and was devoted to Elizabeth. Probably also it seemed to him very good publicity for the party, as he had once suggested to me that a son of the Tory Bishop of Burpham, famous for his reactionary speeches and manifestos, and a very powerful influence on the Conservative and religious thought of England, should contest a seat for Labour. The newspapers would see a good story in it. Jocelyn's name and social caste would advertise the broadmindedness of the

Labour Party and its patronage of youth and the "intelligentsia." His own charm and brilliance would give him a good fighting chance, and Elizabeth Pomeroy's contributions to the party funds demanded recognition.

All that was as plain as a pikestaff. As far as the Press was concerned, Herbert Bradshaw's shrewd reasoning was abundantly fulfilled. The newspapers made a sensation of this political event, and there were big headings across the page of a morning paper which gave me the first news of this political episode at breakfast one day.

"BISHOP'S SON STANDS FOR LABOUR"

"YOUNG SOCIALIST BREAKS AWAY FROM FAMILY TRADITION"

Underneath these headlines was a portrait of Jocelyn, even more incredibly good-looking than he really was, facing one of his father, austere and dignified in lawn sleeves. I stared at both faces, and saw again the likeness between this father and son, the one so smiling and debonair, the other so stern and sad and yet with the same delicate, clean-cut features and the same obstinate lines about the lips.

"The eternal tragedy!" I thought. "Authority and revolt. Old age and youth. Tradition and the young idea. Intolerance and Escape."

Day after day before that by-election I followed Jocelyn's political notoriety. There were interviews with him in several papers. He talked glibly, and sometimes brilliantly, about his reasons for joining the Labour Party. He expressed his sympathy with the working classes struggling to maintain a standard of life which they had reached after centuries of struggle—they were now threatened, he said, by Big Business conspiring to beat them back to the poverty line. He declared his love of fair play, not apparent yet in English life where men who had made a fortune out of the war called for national sacrifice to defend their wealth, but put it all upon the ranks of Labour while they sat in sheltered gardens with three Rolls-Royces in the garage, dreaming of their latest profits in oil and rubber

and artificial silk, cursing the miners who demanded a decent wage for hard and filthy toil, and declaring that England was going to the dogs because they had to pay super-tax to cover the debts of a war which had made them rich. He ridiculed the Conservatives, who put up the bogey of Bolshevism as their only excuse for political existence, knowing full well that it was no more than a hollow turnip to frighten old ladies in their beds, and utterly false to the traditions of English character. What had the Conservatives done during their term of office, he asked, to relieve unemployment, to create new markets, to provide houses for the working population, to bring more land into cultivation, or to fulfil the promises of liberty and equal opportunity which they had made so frequently in election speeches? They had done nothing, said Mr. Jocelyn Pomeroy. They intended to do nothing. It was their philosophy. It was their dead weight of inaction which lay heavily upon English life and prevented any forward movement of ideas and reforms to drag the nation out of its spiritual lethargy, disillusion, and discontent. They had pre-war minds, he said. They thought in terms of 1913, not knowing that the spirit of the people had moved on since then, and that economic problems confronted England and its increasing population which could not be settled by this do-nothing policy, but demanded heroic remedies, adventurous action, far-reaching changes, keen vision, daring leadership. The hope of England, said Jocelyn, lay with the Labour Party, not narrow in its views, not hide-bound to old worn-out traditions, not clinging to privileges which had passed with our ancient reserves of inherited wealth, but fresh in its ardour and enthusiasm, untrammelled, clear-eyed, ready to take risks for the country's sake, resolute for world peace and democratic rights. The Labour Party had nothing to do, he declared, with revolutionary nonsense. It was constitutional and patriotic. It was not taking orders from Moscow. It was not threatening the rights of property or the morals of humanity. It was the party of a nobler patriotism.

All this was rather conventional and rhetorical. But there was one remark among others which amused me and revealed Jocelyn's real individuality.

"As Pitt once said," he remarked to an interviewer, "I

am guilty of the damnable crime of being a young man. That, no doubt, will weigh heavily against me. But I promise not to retard the natural advance of senility. Perhaps after all there is something to be said for youth. You can't put old heads on to young shoulders, but haven't some of our bald-heads made an unholy mess of things? Why not give youth a chance? In a few years it is going to be our world, anyhow! If we make uncomfortable beds, we shall have to lie on them. If we prescribe the wrong medicine for present troubles it's going to be our funeral. . . ." He slipped in something about Elizabeth's League of Youth, and called for recruits.

From Elizabeth herself I heard full details of the lightning campaign which was being conducted on Jocelyn's behalf. She was doing a lot of canvassing for him in the mean streets of Walworth, and her club in that district was being used as his headquarters. Its members were supporting him to a man—mostly out of loyalty to Elizabeth herself, I guessed—and the boy's prospects of success were brilliant. David Swayne was acting as his election agent, and the Labour Party was throwing its full weight into the fight, with ex-Cabinet Ministers speaking at Jocelyn's meetings, and intensive propaganda in the constituency by leaflets, posters, street-corner speeches, and house-to-house visits. Some of the women Labour Members had lost their hearts to Jocelyn and were working day and night to make victory certain for him. So Elizabeth told me, excitedly, and with her usual enthusiasm for any cause she had adopted.

"Yes," I said, "the lure of sex! You can't get away from it, even in politics. That's why votes for women isn't as good as it sounds in theory. A good-looking fellow like Jocelyn will capture the votes of the younger women, however unsound his views may be on such subjects as political economy and social reform. It shows up the weakness of our electoral system."

Elizabeth pooh-poohed my arguments.

"We've left all that kind of rubbish behind," she declared. "You can't rake up those old arguments at this time of day! The women are the keenest politicians and have learnt to think for themselves."

"Flappers?" I asked.

"Working women," she said, "living in overcrowded tene-

ments. The wives and daughters of ex-soldiers badly rewarded for their service in time of war. The mothers and sweethearts of young men living on the dole and eating their hearts out without a chance of regular employment."

"Yes," I said, "that dole! And it's the Labour Party that insists on pauperising the people by that damnable premium on laziness, and supporting the Trades Unions which restrict output and raise the cost of manufactured goods so that we can't compete with our rivals in the markets of the world."

"I'm not answering all that," said Elizabeth. "You go and heckle Jocelyn. He likes it, and has an answer to every question as quick as a flash of lightning. I'm proud to be his aunt."

"What about his father?" I asked.

Elizabeth made a comical grimace.

"That's a tragedy, I admit. That brother of mine takes this election as a mortal blow to his name and pride. He writes me letters full of Biblical quotations, but I haven't time to read them—poor dear. What worries me much more than that is his threat to speak in Walworth on behalf of the jam-and-pickle merchant—against his own son. He accuses Jocelyn of disloyalty, but for the life of me I can't see why a father should try to spoil his son's chances of a brilliant career in the service of his country."

He doesn't approve of that particular form of service," I said. "He's convinced that the Labour Party is hand in glove with Red Revolution, and to tell you the honest truth, I'm not convinced to the contrary. That Trade Union Congress last August went completely Bolshie. It seems to be the power behind the throne, as far as the Labour Party is concerned. How does Jocelyn get over that? How does it square with his faith in Constitutional government?"

"Ask him!" said Elizabeth. "I'm sure the dear boy will give you a convincing answer. As a matter of fact, I can answer it myself. The Trade Union Congress was captured by young and energetic men—rather extreme in their views, no doubt—but they don't represent the rank and file, or the old and steady members who really count—like dear old Herbert Bradshaw, 'Our 'Erb,' as they call him."

Elizabeth was a highly intelligent woman, although, as I have hinted from time to time, rather emotional in her love of humanity and high ideals. In any case, I hadn't called to argue with her, but to find out what was happening behind the scenes of this election which in its small way would test the strength of rival forces at work in English life. Unfortunately, it was going to divide friends and families, between whom I was a kind of intermediary, related to both sides in kinship or sympathy. Jocelyn and his aunt were already excommunicated by the Bishop of Burpham. Even Nancy, who was helping to canvass for Jocelyn, incurred the extreme displeasure of her father, already wounded by her literary notoriety and her escape from parental discipline. Long after the election she showed me a letter he had written to her, rather pathetic in its sadness and reproachfulness.

"MY DEAR" (he wrote), "your mother and I are lonely up here. We miss you dreadfully—your laughter and your brightness. But we could suffer that loss of you with greater courage, with resignation to the will of God, facing the inevitable escape of youth from the parent nest, if we knew that you were guarded by the love of a good man, or pursuing some vocation suitable to womanhood and useful to those in need of service. Alas, Nancy, I have no such consolation. I suppose the success of your first novel will tempt you to write more fiction in the same style, which to me, as you know, is very shocking—I may be old-fashioned—but in any case does not seem to serve any useful or intelligent purpose. What good can it do to anyone? Does it make anyone wiser, more spiritual, more virtuous, more active in God's service? I cannot think so. But I am grieved and anxious for other reasons. Your Aunt Elizabeth, whom I find it hard to forgive, tells me in her last letter (which I do not propose to answer) that you are canvassing for Jocelyn down in Walworth. My dear Nancy, politics are a very serious thing in England to-day, and how much do you know about them? Upon the issue of our present political strife more is involved than Jocelyn's defeat or victory. The fate of England will be decided—the future of our dear country, which you love as much as I do. It is my profound conviction, after unprejudiced study of

every argument and fact I can find, that if the Labour Party comes into power and office this country of ours will be undone. They prate now of Constitutional loyalty, but their friends betray them. They are hopelessly involved with, and dependent upon, men of revolutionary instincts and purpose. Say what you will, they are tarred with Red paint—the redness of revolutionary conspiracies for the overthrow of law and order in the land, for the destruction of religion and morality. Some of the Labour leaders do not see this themselves. They are honest and loyal according to their light—I will go as far as that. But among them, with them, and behind them are men dishonest, malignant, and essentially evil, in league with the spirit of world revolution, anti-religious, enemies of civilisation itself, and in some cases paid agents of the murderers in Moscow. There is no doubt about this. The proofs are abundant. They are self-confessed and even blatantly proclaimed. The Trade Union Congress, the most important assembly of organised labour in this country, voted measures last August at Scarborough which were purely subversive, anarchical, and revolutionary. Their resolutions were pooh-poohed, in some cases derided, by the leaders of the Labour Party, afraid of this revelation. But in May next, when there is every reason to fear another coal strike after the lapse of the Government subsidy—perhaps even a general strike, with its fearful consequences—it will be the Trade Union Congress which will decide the issues of that conflict. The Labour Party will then undoubtedly support that Trade Union Council. They cannot do otherwise. Where, then, is their loyalty to the Constitution? Where is their liberty of action? You may think it absurd that I should write these things to you, a young girl—these dull, political things. But I do so because I want you to see and understand that in canvassing for your brother you may be helping to destroy England, and to promote the cause of evil against righteousness. I would rather you wrote another novel—much as I disapprove of your first adventure in that realm.

“Believe me, dear Nancy,

“Your loving and anxious

“Father. . . .”

Underneath his name were two crosses, for kisses, which

Nancy put to her lips, while tears were in her laughing eyes, as she confessed to Frank.

Well, that was the Bishop's point of view, characteristically expressed, and revealing the tragic gulf between father and son, brother and sister—himself and Elizabeth—in this political conflict. Jocelyn and his aunt were excommunicated by this stern traditionalist. There were other hostilities against Jocelyn, breaking old friendships. My brother-in-law, Southlands, who had liked the boy, declared that his doors were closed against him in future, now that he was a Labour candidate. For once Mervyn agreed with his father and was ironical regarding Jocelyn's allegiance to the Labour cause. Lettice pretended to be vastly amused with Jocelyn's "little pose," as she called it, but I fancied that underneath her amusement she was annoyed and attracted at the same time by Jocelyn's political adventure, on what she called "the wrong side." She invented all sorts of unkind names for him. He was never Jocelyn now, but "Our little Lenin," and "The Parlour Bolshevik," and "Comrade Pomeroy." I am convinced that it was Lettice, and not Ivo Tremayne on his own initiative, who organised ragging parties of Jocelyn's former friends—some of them young men I had seen in his rooms at Oxford, and members of the Society of Glad Young Things, to heckle the Labour candidate for Walworth, and break up his meetings. Night after night, as Elizabeth told me angrily, and yet not without laughter, because her sense of humour was always stronger than her political opinions, Jocelyn had to face ceaseless interruptions from this group of young people, who laughed loudly at his serious arguments, cheered derisively at his best flights of rhetoric, booed him when he denounced the stupidities of the Conservative Party, whistled, stamped, clapped and jeered, when he called for silence and fair play.

"That dreadful niece of yours," said Elizabeth, "has all her claws out against poor Jocelyn. Having broken his heart, the little vixen, she now wants to smash his political career. Why can't she keep away, and flirt with her dissolute young men?"

XXXIV

I WENT down to Walworth one night to see things for myself, and it was rather more exciting than I had bargained for.

Jocelyn was speaking in the Municipal Baths, hired for his meetings. The swimming bath had been boarded over and there was a platform at one end of this ill-ventilated hall in which the atmosphere was already suffocating when I arrived. It was crowded with "the proletariat," in damp clothes on a rainy night and giving forth steam and a sickly smell which made me feel rather faint for a moment or two. They were mostly men and women from the mean streets of this unattractive neighbourhood, shabbily dressed, some of them rather pale and haggard, I thought, after a day in factories and workshops. Because of Jocelyn's youth, I suppose, the younger crowd had rallied up, and the front seats especially were filled with shopgirls, by the look of them, or young factory girls, and their sweethearts. They ate chocolates and sweets from paper bags while waiting for the speeches to begin, and now and again broke out into songs which they had learnt no doubt over the "wireless." Their favourite hymn, repeated over and over again, was a refrain which seemed to me to have no meaning whatever.

"It ain't goin' to rain no mo', no mo',
It ain't goin' to rain no mo'.
Why in the world do the old folks say
It ain't goin' to rain no mo'?"

I had arrived at the hall just in time to see a Rolls-Royce draw up outside, with a long howl from its horn to clear a way through the crowds assembled outside in the drizzling rain. It seemed to excite a certain amount of hostility, and there was

booing and hooting from those who retreated from its wheels and mudguards.

"Goo! . . . Yah! . . . Profiteers! . . . Baby Killers! . . . Parasites!"

A squad of police forced the crowd back with friendly warnings and good-natured pressure.

"Now then! Make way there! Mind your toes! This isn't the first time you've seen a motor-car. Pass along, please."

Ivo Tremayne was driving the Rolls-Royce. I caught one glimpse of his clean-cut profile with a cigarette between his lips. Next to him was my nephew Mervyn, in evening clothes and an opera hat. It was that hat which seemed to excite the hilarity of the mob.

"Look at 'is shut-up 'at!" they shouted, and some of the young women screamed with laughter.

"It's 'Arold Lloyd!" cried a girl, mentioning the name of a famous movie "star." "'Ullo, 'Arold!"

Five or six young people scrambled out of the car and were joined by a group of others like them, who had been waiting for their arrival. One of them was Lettice, bareheaded, with a cloak about her shoulders. For a moment she stood by the car, tall and slim, with her head raised, and a challenging smile in her eyes as she stared at the faces of the crowd who were trying to press close but were held back by policemen with outstretched arms.

At the sight of her there were derisive shouts and shrill laughter.

"Look at Lady Diana! . . . Thinks no end of 'erself! . . . Pity she don't wash the powder off her fice. . . . One of the Dolly Sisters! . . . Ow! . . ."

I tried to get near Lettice and her party, but when I entered the hall ten minutes later, after a struggle in the crowd, I found myself separated from them by a solid mass of damp humanity. Lettice waved her hand to me later, her roving eyes having caught sight of me at last. I saw her sudden recognition, and her lips formed words which I couldn't hear but guessed. "Hullo, Nunky!"

A few minutes afterwards Jocelyn appeared with his supporters, among whom I knew David Swayne and Herbert

Bradshaw, the ex-Cabinet Minister, and Elizabeth, and Frank Hardy. Herbert Bradshaw took the chair, and Jocelyn stood for a moment looking at his audience with a quizzical smile. He wore morning clothes—a tail coat and striped trousers elegantly cut, with no concession to class consciousness. His eyes stared over the faces in the hall below his platform. I think he was searching for Lettice in that crowd, and presently he saw her, as I guessed by his heightened colour and a quick shrug of the shoulders, as though to say, "You here again? Well, I don't mind." He turned and said something to Herbert Bradshaw, who nodded, and then he sat down with his long legs stretched out and one hand in his trousers' pocket. There was a fearful racket going on in the hall. Labour was cheering its leaders, and Herbert Bradshaw seemed more popular than Jocelyn.

"Good old Bert! . . . Our Bert!"

Somebody started singing a lugubrious hymn which I understood to be "The Red Flag," and it was taken up by various groups, the shrill voices of the women rising above the male bass. It puzzled me that the Labour Party, which stood for Constitutional Government, should adopt the hymn of revolution.

I looked at Elizabeth, and could not help smiling at her, though she could not see me. She was leaning forward and whispering to Jocelyn. There was some joke between them, for they both laughed. Then she kissed her hand to someone below the platform, perhaps some of her club boys. "Auntie," they had called her in the war, when she tired herself out in serving our men. I thought how beautiful she looked still, because of the humour in her eyes, and the flush of excitement in her face. Once I had loved her as a young girl, when she was like an English rose. How quickly the years had passed—how young she still looked, though nearly twelve years had gone since the beginning of the war. She at least still kept the flag of faith flying for England and the younger crowd.

For a moment I wished that I could join her on that platform, taking the side of Labour, with conviction and enthusiasm, instead of sitting on the fence, neither one thing nor the other, believing in democracy yet doubtful of its claims,

sympathetic towards the working classes yet hating change and afraid of revolution, bewildered by economic problems not to be cured by emotional words of State subsidies.

Herbert Bradshaw was allowed to make his speech without interruption. It was a dull and rather pompous speech, setting out the policy of the Labour Party, affirming its constitutional ideals and purpose, repudiating the Reds, ridiculing the Conservatives, and finally recommending Jocelyn as a brilliant young recruit to the cause of "Liberty."

"As you all know," said Herbert Bradshaw, "this young man's father is a—Bishop!"

There were roars of laughter, as though this were the greatest joke in the world.

"That Bishop," said Herbert Bradshaw, raising his hand for silence, "is one of the leaders of Reaction in this poor old country of ours. Some of his sermons and speeches, to say nothing of his articles in the Press—for which, no doubt, he gets very good fees—have not endeared him to working folk. He thinks we're all a pack of traitors, paid to destroy the Constitution by Russian revolutionaries."

"Shame!" shouted the audience.

"Ay, shame it is," said Herbert Bradshaw. "But this young fellow here has broken away from that reactionary old Pa of his. He has given a lead to English youth by departing from family traditions, turning his back on the privileges of caste and wealth, and striding bravely towards the Light."

There were loud cheers from the audience. The shop-girls and factory girls in the front seats clapped their hands with the noise of machine-gun fire, and their eyes flashed out admiration for that good-looking young man who glanced at them shyly and shifted in his seat uneasily.

"It takes a bit of doing," said Herbert Bradshaw, "to break with family tradition. It's the hardest thing for youth. But it's the plucky thing. It's the fearless thing, when it's done for conscience' sake. This young fellow, Mr. Jocelyn Pomeroy, has come over to Labour because his education and intelligence tell him that Right is on our side, that Justice is on our side, that Peace is on our side, that Progress is on our side."

And so on and so on, punctuated by cheers, rising into

shrill-pitched enthusiasm from the feminine part of the audience, or one section of it, when Jocelyn was introduced by his leader, who put one arm affectionately round his shoulder for a moment.

Jocelyn strolled to the edge of the platform to make his speech. He looked perfectly cool, slightly amused, even a little bored. So he stood, when suddenly, from the back of the hall, there rose a discordant music of many mouth-organs playing "Rule Britannica!"

It came from the direction of Lettice and her friends, and standing up, like many others round me, I saw that Ivo Tremayne was mounted on his chair and beating time with a roll of paper to a group of amateur musicians, who were busy with those mouth-organs and making a noise sufficient to drown any speech from Jocelyn.

Herbert sprang to his feet on the platform and called stentoriously for free speech and fair play. He was answered by a musical rendering of "Three Blind Mice," with variations. Jocelyn turned towards Elizabeth and shrugged his shoulders again. Once or twice he began his speech and I heard the word "Friends!" But the mouth-organists were hostile to him. They followed "Three Blind Mice" by "John Brown's Body," but that stirring tune was in turn overwhelmed by the shouts of Labour sympathisers.

"Shut up! . . . Cads; . . . Clear out, or we'll throw you out! . . . Shame. . . . 'Aven't you learnt to be've yourselves? . . . Give the speaker 'is chance. . . . It ain't playing the game. . . . Chuck it!"

Ivo Tremayne conducted the "March of the Men of Harlech" with grandiloquent gestures, while the shouting grew in intensity and rage. Then suddenly the music ended, followed by three cheers for Mr. Baldwin, led by the high, clear voice of my niece Lettice. Then silence. It was evident that the Glad Young Things were taking breath and inclined to give Jocelyn a brief innings.

He took advantage of this respite, and spoke rather well and reasonably of Labour's claim to leadership. He was good-humoured, wonderfully self-possessed. His phrases were well-constructed and he had all the manner of the Oxford Union.

I have forgotten the points of his speech, but it was when he was dealing with unemployment and the Government's failure to solve this problem that he was interrupted again from that group of well-dressed young people in the body of the hall.

"I wish to ask the speaker a few questions," cried a clear, challenging voice. It was the voice of Lettice, and she was standing on her chair supported by Ivo Tremayne, whose hand she held to keep herself steady.

"Silence! . . . Sit down there! . . . Order, order! . . ."

Angry shouts came in waves of noise from all parts of the hall.

Herbert Bradshaw came to the edge of the platform, side by side with Jocelyn. He stretched out his heavy, pawlike hand in a gesture of command.

"Questions will be answered at the end of the speeches," he shouted loudly. "We must insist on a bit of order in this meeting. It ain't a bear garden, you foolish children down there. If you're looking for a bear garden you'll find it at the Zoo."

Lettice's voice rang out again.

"I would like to ask Mr. Pomeroy if he is in favour of giving the dole to men who don't want to work."

"Shut up!" cried the factory girls. "Shut your mouth, you silly kitten!"

Lettice was not intimidated by this hostility.

"Will Mr. Pomeroy tell us how he earns his own living?" she asked, with an air of amiable enquiry. "Is he subsidised by Moscow?"

"Sit down! . . . Knock 'er across the mouth! . . . Tear the frock off 'er back! . . ."

Ivo Tremayne was on his chair. He replaced Lettice in this organised game of heckling Jocelyn.

"Will the distinguished candidate for Labour——"

"A shout of rage drowned the last part of his words.

"Slosh 'im across the jaw! . . . Turn 'im out!"

Other young gentlemen in the company of Lettice and Ivo jumped on to their chairs, and endeavoured to put questions to the Labour candidate, who was once of their company and caste. They were not serious questions. They were very

impertinent questions. These young people were enjoying an excellent rag as a change from fox-trotting parties, and treasure hunts.

I heard one question which carried, in Lettice's high voice, above the tumult.

"Does Mr. Pomeroy believe in loyalty?"

Jocelyn heard these words. I could see by the sudden flush on his face that they had reached and stung him. But he didn't try to answer. It was useless, with all that noise surging up to him. He stood there, rocking a little on heel and toe, with his hands in his pockets, smiling. His eyes were fixed on Lettice, that slim, graceful beauty standing on the chair with her evening cloak falling over one shoulder. He looked at her with a kind of angry admiration, an amused exasperation.

"Friends and comrades!" said Herbert Bradshaw in stentorian tones.

On the platform, David Swayne, who was Jocelyn's election agent, was whispering to Elizabeth. That dear lady looked distressed. Once she rose and, in a comical way, shook her fist in the direction of Lettice and her friends.

Jocelyn was allowed to continue his speech again. I think he had been going ten minutes with only occasional comments and ribald laughter from his political opponents, when another section of the audience who up to now had been perfectly quiet, neither applauding nor interrupting either side, suddenly raised a riot in the hall. It was started by the unfurling of a Red Flag by a young woman whom, for a moment, I imagined to be that strange lady Ruth Windle, of Frank Hardy's lodging-house in Raphael Street. But it was one of her political sisterhood, wilder-looking and more dangerous, with a pale, sullen face framed in black hair cut like a boy's.

"Up the revolution! . . . Down with the Middle Classes! . . . Long live Lenin and the Red International."

The woman stood waving her banner while a score of shabby young men surrounded her and shouted a lugubrious chorus.

"Out the Reds!" came an answering shout. The whole audience was on its feet, surging towards the revolutionary group. It reminded me of Elizabeth's inaugural meeting for the League of Youth, but there was more passion here, a very

ugly note of rage in the tumult of voices. Some of the Reds were roughly handled before they were rescued by a body of police who suddenly invaded the hall and made several arrests with strict impartiality.

I saw Ivo Tremayne led away by two stalwart bobbies. As I afterwards learnt, he had jumped into the middle of the Reds and laid about him like Douglas Fairbanks as "Robin Hood," with great enjoyment. He spent the night in Walworth police station, and was fined five pounds in the morning for disorderly conduct likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

But that was not the most tragic episode of an evening which did not inspire me with confidence in young democracy. It was Lettice who paid the heaviest penalty for political interruption. After Ivo's arrest and the abandonment of the meeting, she made her way out of the hall with her group of friends and stood in the seething crowd at the entrance of the Municipal Baths, waiting until Mervyn brought up Ivo's Rolls-Royce from its place in a side street. I joined her there, rather anxious about her in this mob, and touched her on the arm.

"Better slip away quietly, Lettice. Some of these people don't seem to like your style of beauty."

She turned to me with an excited laugh.

"Hullo, uncle! What a priceless evening! Jocelyn couldn't get a word in edgeways! Wasn't that a great idea about the mouth-organs?"

The Rolls-Royce drew up by the kerb-stone, nosing its way through the crowd in the road.

"Come on, Letty!" said a pretty girl, clutching my niece's hand.

Lettice turned for a moment to speak to someone. I saw it was Jocelyn, who had come out with David Swayne and stood closer to her.

"Sorry, Jocelyn! . . . But all's fair in love and war. . . . You won't get in, you know."

She looked at him with a laughing mockery, standing there in the blurred light of a street lamp under a drizzle of rain.

"I've a pretty good chance," said Jocelyn. "Nothing that you can do is going to affect it, either way."

"Don't you be too sure," said Lettice. "I'm out to beat you, Comrade Pomeroy! You didn't get much of an innings to-night."

"I like to see you at my meetings," said Jocelyn. "You brighten things up."

"Letty!" cried the girl at her side, "Mervyn's waiting, and the police are getting peeved."

"Coming!" cried Lettice.

She jumped into the car waiting there by the kerb-stone. Mervyn was driving it, now that Ivo had been taken away by the majesty of the law. There was a sound of booing as it moved off. Walworth seemed to have a prejudice against Rolls-Royces and pretty ladies who heckled their speakers.

I caught a glimpse of Lettice, squeezed in between two of her girl friends. She was sitting forward, and leaned sideways to pull up the window. I waved my hand to her, and at the same moment heard a crash of glass. Some blackguard in the crowd, some vicious young hooligan, had hurled a stone at the car, and it went clean through the window and struck Lettice on the forehead. I didn't see this. I only heard the splintering of glass and a scream from one of the girls in the car. It came to a dead stop and was instantly surrounded by police and a surging mob.

I was thrust on one side, violently. It was Jocelyn, trying to get by. His face was dead white, and I heard him say, "Oh, my God!" in an agonised voice.

It was the last time that Lettice heckled him at any of his meetings. That stone had made a nasty wound on her forehead, and it had to be stitched up at St. Thomas's Hospital, where they kept her for the night, much against her will.

THAT abominable incident was reported in the papers, sensationally, of course.

“DISGRACEFUL ELECTION SCENES IN
WALWORTH”

“PEER’S DAUGHTER ATTACKED BY HOOLIGANS”
“LABOUR CANDIDATE HECKLED BY SMART SET”

It was not the only episode of its kind. Political passion ran high in Walworth as the by-election drew near. The Conservative candidate, Sir Joseph Meggs, Bart., of jam-and-pickle fame, issued a formal protest against the intimidation of his supporters by organised rowdiness, incited by Communists and Labour. His own wife had been assaulted while canvassing from house to house. His election agent had had the tyres of his car slashed. A mob of hooligan boys had tried to break up his meetings. In a letter to the *Morning Post* he warned the country solemnly that it was threatened with Bolshevism, incited by the murders of Moscow. He asked all loyal and patriotic people to rally to the side of law and order against this demonstration of anarchy in South London.

I confess that this hooliganism made me feel a little nervous. Exaggerated as it was by the Conservative candidate, in order to create political prejudice against his opponent, there was an element of truth in it sufficient to arouse a sense of uneasiness—I will not say alarm—in the minds of people like myself, not quite sure of the steadiness of our English character and traditional good nature in the generation that had grown up since the war. There was something un-English in these attacks on women, this stone-throwing at motor-cars, these outbreaks of violence by groups of young Communists. Perhaps if that great strike were to happen in May according

to prediction, it might be the beginning of a very unpleasant chapter in English history. Who of us know our own people since the war? Who of us could say what changes had happened in our national psychology, or what passions of hate and cruelty lurked beneath the fair appearance of our social life? Discontent, disillusionment, unemployment, the evil propaganda of international revolution, might touch off high-explosive forces suppressed so far by the power of tradition. I had refused to believe in these gloomy prophecies. I had kept faith in the common sense and good humour of the English people. But these ugly episodes down in Walworth shook me.

The worst of them happened when Jocelyn's father came to speak on behalf of the Conservative candidate, against his son's party and policy. Elizabeth had tried to dissuade him from this step, but he had refused to answer her letters.

My brother-in-law, Southlands, agreed to speak with him on the same evening, and Lettice, with her head still bandaged, insisted on going with Mervyn to the meeting which the Bishop of Burham was to address in the Town Hall.

There seemed to me something tragic and sinister in this affair. Only a stone's throw away, in those Municipal Baths, Jocelyn was addressing a Labour crowd, and his sister Nancy was to be on the platform with him that night, as she had previously told me. Elizabeth was supporting her nephew, as usual, against her brother and everything he stood for in family tradition and political opinion. It seemed to me atrociously suggestive of that Civil War in England in the time of the Stuarts, when fathers and sons were on different sides and families were divided even to the death. Was there a time coming when that would happen again, and when each one of us would have to decide in his own soul which side he was on, with no easy middle way for men like myself, trying to steer between revolution and reaction, trying to be fair to both sides, trying to build spiritual bridges between capital and labour, democracy and tradition, youth and old age, authority and liberty. In private houses, at quiet dinner-tables, among intelligent people, I heard talk of a coming revolution when this would happen. I found everywhere a fear of dangerous

forces gathering for strife. The nation was organising into two camps for a trial of strength. Labour men like Comrade Chick were uttering dark threats of what was going to happen in May. The Government, as I heard from Southlands, were taking no chances and were quietly recruiting and organising a mysterious body called the O.M.S.—Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies—which would be ready to smash any attempt to hold up our national life by a general strike of a revolutionary character. Southlands was taking it seriously. At dinner one night he tried to make my flesh creep by the vision of an England without trains running, or factories working, without light, food, or fuel, while millions of idle men, led by revolutionary leaders, played hell in our great cities.

"Scotland," he said, "will certainly go Red. You'll see the Red Flag flying from Glasgow Town Hall. The whole of the Clyde will declare for Communism. Liverpool, the mining districts of Wales, Rugby and Coventry, the Potteries, the London Docks and the East End will be centres of revolutionary violence. Pray God we have a strong Government. I'm afraid of Baldwin. He's too good-natured. Those Socialistic ideas of his . . ."

"None of these things will happen," I declared. "I refuse to believe in them. All you people are afraid of bogeys which don't exist. I can't see the least justification for all this blue funk."

But that night in the Town Hall at Walworth, I was not so sure. Perhaps I was wrong in my faith about the quality of this post-war England. Perhaps I was putting my head in the sand and refusing to see approaching peril! . . .

The hall was packed an hour before the Bishop came. Outside I could hear the cheers and counter-cheers of seething crowds. This political duel between father and son had stirred the imagination of the mob. People had poured in from other districts. At the Press table, near which I sat, there was a battalion of journalists waiting to report the Bishop's speech verbatim. They were drawing pictures on their blotting-pads, gazing round the hall with inquisitive eyes. There would be long descriptive accounts next morning of this audience of

middleclass Conservatives who sang patriotic songs with great enthusiasm and waved little Union Jacks and responded to shouts from the gallery with three cheers for Mr. Baldwin, three cheers for Mrs. Baldwin, and three cheers more for the Bishop of Burpham, before singing "God Save the King" with as much solemn fervour as though revolution were already at the doors.

Inside the hall there, we were aware of the Bishop's arrival in front of the building. There could be no other reason for a sudden outburst of cheering in the street, followed and overwhelmed by prolonged booing from thousands of voices. It was not the good-humoured row of a political crowd making the usual demonstration against one of its opponents. There was something savage and sinister in this hostile noise, I thought. There was real anger in it. It was the voice of hatred and mob passion. This Bishop—Jocelyn's father—had been writing a series of articles in a Conservative paper on the Anarchy of Labour. I had read them with profound interest and some distress of mind. They were a clear and cruel analysis of Labour leadership and its political and social philosophy as expressed in the speeches and writings of many Trade Union Officials whom I had believed to be moderate and well-meaning men. They revealed not only a crass ignorance of elementary economics, but a destructive and revolutionary purpose. In succeeding articles the Bishop showed the effect of this propaganda upon the mentality of the rank and file in mines and factories, where there was an organised limitation of output, and a tyrannical use of Trade Union rules—obstructing the development of industry, increasing costs, encouraging deliberate time-wasting, and crippling our competition with foreign rivals. The Bishop made a strong attack upon a certain class of men known as "shop stewards" and accused them of Bolshevik tendencies and methods which, if unchecked, would lead our country to the brink of ruin and destroy the industrial system upon which the working classes depended for their livelihood.

Those articles, arresting, disturbing, not yet answered in any convincing way by the representatives of Labour, had obviously been quoted or reproduced in newspapers read by

the working classes in this district of South London. The anger they had roused, and the Bishop's previous reputation as an enemy of democracy, accounted surely for the storm of fury which rose in gusts outside the Town Hall when he drove up with the Conservative candidate to address this meeting. It lasted for several minutes, during which time all of us in the hall rose from our seats, listening anxiously to very ugly sounds which reached us from without. Some of the newspaper reporters left their seats at the Press table and slipped out of the hall. Now and again, above the hooting, there rose the shrill scream of women.

One of the Press men addressed a quiet question to me as I was standing near him:

"Has the revolution begun, do you think?" he asked, with a smile which was not altogether humorous.

Presently one of his colleagues came back and spoke to him excitedly.

"Pandemonium outside, old man! . . . They tried to get at that blasted old Bishop. . . . Nearly tipped his car over. . . . The police had to charge the crowd. . . . Some of the women were trampled on. Hence their screams. . . . All very amusing!"

Five minutes later the Conservative candidate and his supporters came to the platform, and the whole audience rose and cheered as they took their places. Sir Joseph Meggs, upon whom his father's mantle had fallen, as the Jam and Pickle King, looked flustered and upset. He was a florid young man of thirty or thereabouts, with straw-coloured hair and pale eyes. He wore a white camellia in his buttonhole and a black tie, wound twice round his neck, like an old-fashioned stock. He did not impress me as a young man likely to lead the nation to any spiritual heights, but I was sorry for him, because of the ordeal through which he had just passed. It isn't pleasant, as I know, to be in the midst of a hostile mob. Some of his supporters looked equally nervous and distressed. A stout gentleman among them mopped his shining bald pate as though he had just emerged from a Rugby "scrum." One of Mr. Baldwin's Ministers fumbled nervously with the string of his eyeglass and glared at the Conservative candidate as though

that scene outside was entirely his fault. But my gaze fastened on the Bishop of Burpham.

Jocelyn's father stood there on the platform, unruffled, self-controlled, austere, wonderfully handsome. His tall, thin figure, in his Bishop's dress, was like one of those old-fashioned silhouettes cut out of black paper, and his fine, ascetic face, with its thin lips, slightly ironical looked utterly indifferent to the cheers which rose up at him, as I am certain he had been utterly indifferent to the menace of the mob.

I need not give a report of his speech which followed the blundering, pompous stupidities of Sir Joseph Meggs and that Cabinet Minister. It was fully reported next day, with leading articles according to the political colour of the newspapers. His text was the failure of democracy and the need of authority, discipline, and government by trained intelligence. He spoke far above the heads of his audience, in an admirable classical English which was beautiful to hear. His contempt of ignorance, his scorn of the blatant nonsense of political clap-trap, his analytical mind, his knowledge of history, his gloomy vision of a people demoralised and debauched by doles, State Socialism, and political pandering, his prophecy of national disaster unless the spirit of the people returned to religion, discipline, and industry, put a chill upon an audience which had come to be flattered and tickled by the usual party flamboyancy. I noticed the Conservative Cabinet Minister by his side becoming uneasy and impatient as the Bishop continued in this strain of intellectual and moral argument. It was not vote-catching stuff. It was uncommonly critical of the Government in which this Cabinet Minister was a pillar of strength. Even a Conservative Government has to play to the gallery now and then. . . .

The Bishop made one reference to his son Jocelyn. It was the only personal note in his speech.

"As all of you know," he said, "my son is the Labour candidate in this election. That is why I am here to-night. In this crisis of English history fathers will be divided against their sons, and brothers against brothers, and friends against friends, because there can be no truce or compact between those who

stand for the old traditions of law and order and those who believe in social revolution. My son has been duped by the false gospel of liberty and revolt. He has denied authority and experience. Like all this modern youth of ours, he is a rebel against the old code of law upon which our family life, and our national strength, were established through the ages. He is too young to possess even the elements of that knowledge of life which can be gained only by painful experience, earnest study, agony, and prayer, and tears. Because of his youth I forgive him for his folly and his presumption, as I cannot forgive those sinister men who are exploiting him because of his name, and hiding from him their criminal and secret plots against society and civilisation. He is my son, but I pray for his defeat in this election, because I love England, and truth, and the justice of God."

The applause that followed was subdued and depressed. The Bishop of Burpham was not rousing as a political orator. He had not attempted a single joke. He had not uttered one party slogan. He had made no appeal to emotion. His austerity and gloom were blighting.

When he left the platform, I think he must have stayed talking with Sir Joseph Meggs and his supporters in one of the waiting-rooms. Possibly he had been persuaded not to leave the hall until most of the crowds had cleared away. As it happened, this delay in leaving was unfortunate in its result, because his departure coincided with the end of Jocelyn's meeting at the Public Baths near by. Jocelyn's audience became aware that the Bishop and the Conservative candidate were about to enter their motor-car, and immediately swarmed in that direction, in spite of the police who tried to thrust them back. Again hostile cries were raised, and I heard shouts of "Down with the Bishop! . . ."

I was standing outside the Town Hall, watching this scene, when the Bishop came out with his party and stood on the steps close to me.

"Do you think we can get through?" he asked quietly, as he walked down towards the closed Daimler which was waiting for him.

Then, suddenly, I saw Jocelyn and David Swayne. They

had pushed their way through the crowd and stood in the open space which had been kept clear by the police.

It was not curiosity which had brought them there. As I heard afterwards from Jocelyn, he was nervous for his father's safety and had shoved his way through his own supporters in order to guard him against any such hooliganism as that injury to Lettice. So he said, and I believe him, and yet I think his impulse also was to catch a glimpse of his father again in this time of political conflict. He had his overcoat turned up at the collar and had lost his hat in the scrimmage.

The light from the street lamp fell full on his face, and I saw that he had an expression of intense emotion as his father came down the steps of the Town Hall.

He took a step forward, and I heard him say "Father!" but a policeman, not recognising him, thrust him back with a jab of his elbow. Perhaps it was that movement, or Jocelyn's call, which made the Bishop turn his head. He saw his son quite clearly, I am certain, and for a moment their eyes must have met, but he made no sign of recognition.

The Bishop entered his car with Sir Joseph Meggs, as cheers and boos rose again louder, and the police leaned heavily against the pressure of the mob.

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The election took place next day and I stood by Jocelyn's side as the votes were being counted. Elizabeth was there, with Nancy and Frank Hardy. Sir Joseph Meggs, with his family and supporters, was on the other side of the tables. As the ballot papers were sorted out by the clerks, it was impossible to give a guess as to the final result. The batches piled up in favour of Jocelyn. Then there was a run on the side of Meggs. Mr. Parfrement, the Liberal, our leading authority on butterflies and moths, was out of the running altogether. He stood with his wife, trying to hide his discomfiture. He was sucking acid tablets to cure the huskiness of his throat after his election oratory.

Jocelyn smoked innumerable cigarettes, and chatted with Nancy and Elizabeth with a forced gaiety. I could see his

nervousness, his tense excitement. His face was flushed. His eyes were very bright and sparkling.

"It's been a great game, anyhow," he said to me once.

David Swayne was white with emotion, I could see him glancing now and then at Jocelyn with his usual hero-worship. Jocelyn was his convert. Between them there was the friendship of David and Jonathan.

"You're winning," he said several times. "Hands down. . . . It's going to be a great victory for Labour."

"A pretty close thing," said Jocelyn, with an air of indifference, gallantly assumed.

Nancy came up to me and whispered.

"Are we winning, do you think?"

She was trembling with excitement, as I could see by her hands which twisted and untwisted an amber necklace at her throat.

"I'm not sure," I answered guardedly. "Meggs is beginning to pile up votes. The middle classes have rallied up."

"Oh, Jocelyn *must* win!" said Nancy. "Everybody has fallen in love with him. I'm frightfully proud of him!"

Elizabeth was standing on the balcony with Frank Hardy, looking down upon the mob in the street below. Those massed crowds were singing and cheering. Great gusts of laughter came up as political cartoons appeared on a white screen above a shop front opposite the Town Hall. "Loud speakers," placed in shop windows, were blaring out jazz music from the Savoy Hotel. I heard that refrain which had been sung at Jocelyn's meeting: "It ain't goin' to rain no mo', no mo'." The crowd took up the tune and sang it lustily.

I spoke to Elizabeth.

"Feeling confident?"

She turned and smiled at me, and put her hand on my arm.

"I'm past feeling. . . . I daren't hope too much. . . . I'm just saying foolish little prayers to God for that boy's sake."

"Perhaps God isn't on the side of Labour," I ventured to say, half seriously. "Who knows?"

"God is on the side of youth," said Elizabeth, as once before she had told her brother.

But alas for Jocelyn, God, if He had any interest in that bye-election, was on the side of Sir Joseph Meggs.

Jocelyn was defeated by no more than a hundred votes, on a poll of sixteen thousand.

The result was flashed on the screen outside, within a second of its announcement, by the chief returning officer, and I heard the mingled roars of cheers and groans from the great concourse below.

Sir Joseph Meggs, that youngish straw-headed man with the pale eyes and the black silk stock round his neck, was being pushed on to the balcony. Jocelyn intercepted him with outstretched hand and smiling eyes. The boy's face was pale, but he had taken his knock gallantly.

"Good luck!" he said, and his hand waited for a friendly grip from his political opponent. But it was not forthcoming.

"To hell with Labour . . . and boy Bolshies!" said Sir Joseph Meggs, with a sudden passion of rage and exultation. The taste of victory was like strong liquor to him. His pale eyes gleamed with an inner fire of excitement. His face was aflame. He staggered a little, as though in drink, as his friends pushed him on to the balcony outside the windows. A moment later I heard his rasping voice shouting out old spell words.

"Empire! . . . Law and Order! . . . British common-sense!"

Elizabeth went up and kissed Jocelyn on the forehead. There were tears in her eyes, but she smiled at him emotionally.

"Better luck next time!" she said.

Jocelyn lit another cigarette. He must have smoked fifty or more that evening. I noticed that his hand was trembling, though he answered with a laugh.

"No, aunt. There'll be no next time as far as I'm concerned. I've done with politics. . . . I'll get a decent job in life."

Nancy was weeping. She put her arm round her brother's shoulder and said "Poor old boy!"

Frank Hardy, that humble lover of Nancy Pomeroy, grabbed Jocelyn's arm and said: "You put up a grand fight, old lad. Best of all, you played fair."

The most stricken among us was David Swayne, Jocelyn's election agent, his political comrade, his social slave.

"That swine!" he said, looking towards the balcony where the successful candidate was addressing the mob. "That foul swine of a profiteer. To think that England should be governed by men like that!"

He stood there with his fists clenched, a lock of red hair fell over his forehead. There was a sullen, despondent look in the ugly, attractive face of this young Labour man, so full of character, so passionately class-conscious, in spite of Jocelyn's companionship and satire.

His rage relieved the situation a little for this group of dejected souls, standing alone there, in defeat, abandoned by the rest of the company, who had crowded to the balcony where the victor was getting his ovation.

Jocelyn went over to David Swayne and punched him gently in the ribs, after a burst of light-hearted laughter.

"It's my funeral, old man, not yours! . . . I let you down badly. . . . This isn't my game, after all, in spite of all your coaching."

Elizabeth collected us all.

"If you're as hungry as I am," she said, "you'll want that supper that's waiting for us. Youth will be served, and it's Aunt Elizabeth that will hand round the sandwiches and drink confusion to the enemy. . . . Sir Joseph Meggs, M.P.! I'll never buy another pot of his beastly jam, as long as I live. I always suspected the absence of a natural pip."

At a side door of the Town Hall we bundled into her car and left the bawling mob behind.

On the journey home to Rutland Gate, Jocelyn, who had been sitting very silent, spoke only one sentence.

"Won't the governor be pleased!"

At the house in Rutland Gate, Elizabeth's butler opened the door to us and made a little speech to Jocelyn.

"The news came through on the loud speaker, sir. I 'appen to be a Conservative, begging your pardon. But I much deplore your personal defeat, sir, if you'll allow me to say so."

"Thanks very much," said Jocelyn. "And how about a whisky-and-soda?"

XXXVI

IT was a month after that bye-election in South London that the nation was faced with a social crisis which belongs to recent history. So much had already been written about the General Strike, so much is still being written about its sequel of the long and dreary coal strike and its economic consequences, that I need not chronicle its story here, except as it touched the lives of those people in whom I am so deeply interested. Its drama did indeed touch all their lives, not because they played great parts in it but because they, like all the rest of our people, were put to a test of character by this sudden menace of social upheaval. These young people I have been writing about—the Mervyns and Jocelyns and Lettices of post-war England—seemed to have been waiting for this challenge to their spirit and quality. . . .

And those ten days of General Strike brought out into the open all those half-hidden forces which had been gathering for conflict since the war—a conflict of ideas, irreconcilable, antagonistic, illogical and emotional in most minds—threatening an explosive clash which might, we thought, shake the very foundations of our social system. In the mean streets of our great cities—in what numbers we knew not—were groups of little revolutionary minds, embittered, cankered, not without some reason or justice, but not working on lines of reason or justice, like that strange lady, Ruth Windle, and her pale-faced brother. The Reds, in touch with Moscow, lured and hypnotised by that terrible experiment of Communism whose utter failure, spiritually and economically, they did not know or acknowledge, had wormed themselves into many hiding-places where they worked secretly, with missionary zeal, to spread their religion of revolt. They had established “cells” in many factories and workshops, as Frank Hardy had told me. They had captured some places at least in the very head-

quarters of organised labour—that Trades Union Council, which was the G.H.Q. of industrial warfare. In Scotland, and the North, and Wales, there were causes of passion and resentment against prevailing conditions—the unfulfilled promises of a war that was to make the world “safe for democracy,” bad-housing conditions, that creeping paralysis of unemployment which had demoralised many hundreds of thousands of men, living idly and miserably on a “dole” which kept them from starvation but not from bitterness. The first cause of the General Strike was the withdrawal of the Government coal subsidy and the posting up of notices in the pits offering wages below a decent standard of life to the mining population. It was an ultimatum by owners who had made fortunes in time of war, though now their coal was being produced at a loss in many worn-out pits, owing to foreign competition, high costs of production, and a slackening of the world demand for coal. But that was only the symbol of a struggle far greater in extent than that industrial problem. It was, as we see clearly now, a struggle of moral and political ideas. This coal business could have been settled rapidly if there had been nothing more in it than the arithmetic of the pits. Some concessions on both sides, an acknowledgment of hard, inescapable facts, a tuning up of efficiency, on both sides, co-operation by owners and miners for the general good of the industry, would have arranged it all. But there were other forces at work, more powerful than economic laws—class hatred, suspicion, political theories, visionary ideals, revolutionary purposes, moral and spiritual antagonisms, emotional stresses. It seems to me that the Bishop of Burpham, my dear Elizabeth’s brother, represents in many ways one side of the conflict which was fought out, though not to a finish, by that general strike. He stands in my mind for the temper and quality which is still traditional in many types of English character, hating democracy—because of its glaring faults of ignorance and indiscipline—intolerant of new claims to liberty because they seem to weaken the old moralities and decencies of life. During that ten days of social upheaval, this Bishop’s type of mind was revealed, with even greater intolerance, by many other friends of mine, and, I am sure, by a large body of old-fashioned and tradi-

tional people, silenced for a long time by the progress of ideas for which they had profound contempt and dislike. They were all for "smashing" Labour. They clamoured for a dictatorship. They rejoiced when the Government recruited an army of special constables and revealed an imposing show of military force. "Thank God, we have got back to discipline," they said. Their greatest fear—next to a fear of a Bolshevik revolution which they expected hourly—was a weakness on the part of the Government which might compromise with the spirit of anarchy and hesitate to mow down the rebels and shed sufficient blood to purge the nation of its poison. For years since the war these old-fashioned and traditional men and women had watched the indiscipline of the nation with alarm and terror. Did they not see it in their own households? Did they not find it in their own sons and daughters? Anarchy and Bolshevism were not only in mean streets. They were in the manners and morals of the time, in the hearts of Lettice and Mervyn and Jocelyn. Since the war they believed that something had snapped in the spirit of the people. They were doubtful of this new youth, hostile to this new spirit of revolt. It was all, they thought, part and parcel of the same social dangers—a denial of authority, a desire for a good time without paying the price by hard work, a weak sympathy with socialistic ideals, which were anti-national, anti-religious, subversive of law and order. Now all their fears were justified. This General Strike was to be a frightful fulfilment of all their prophecies. It would have to be smashed ruthlessly, at all costs of sacrifice and bloodshed, for England's sake. . . .

That was the point of view of my brother-in-law, Southlands. I was staying with him again, for my sister Helen's sake, and I remember the drift of our conversation on the night when the General Strike was declared. It was a gloomy foreboding of civil strike amounting to something like revolution. He was afraid, and angry, and harshly intolerant of any liberal or moderating views of mine.

We were listening to late news which came into that quiet library at Southlands through a "loud speaker" placed on a revolving bookcase by my nephew Mervyn, who was keen on this wireless instrument because it satisfied his yearnings for

syncopated rhythm. It was tuned up to the Savoy Hotel, which was broadcasting dance music. "*The Savoy Havana Band has just played——*" After each dance tune that announcement came into the library in a harsh, metallic voice which became exasperating in its deadly repetition. The Savoy Havana Band had just played "Valencia," or "Poor Little Rich Girl," or "Tea for Two."

"Curse the Savoy Havana Band!" said my brother-in-law, fretfully.

We were playing chess together, without much interest in the game, both our minds being distracted by that conference in Downing Street between the Government and the coal owners and the miners' delegates which was to decide for peace or war in our industrial life. At midnight, unless an agreement were reached, the night shifts in the coal fields would come out of the pits for the last time—perhaps for many weeks or months. The day shifts had already brought up their tools and gear, as we had heard with a chill of apprehension an hour ago from the wireless bulletins. Worse than that was threatened. The Government, after weeks of discussion, earnest endeavours for settlement on the basis of the Coal Report, and protracted conferences with all parties to the dispute, were faced with the threat of a general strike, conveyed to them by the Trades Union Council. Unless the spirit of peace prevailed in this hour or two before midnight, unless the fair and reasonable mind of Mr. Baldwin could build a bridge over the gulf which divided the representatives of the owners and the men as the hands of the clock moved towards another day, there would be a complete paralysis of industrial life in Great Britain and millions of men would stand off their jobs. The machinery of our social organisation would come to a dead stop.

All the great trades were affected. No trains would be running. No food could be moved except by volunteer effort and permission of the Trades Union Council. Even the newspapers would not appear, and we should know nothing of what was happening in England except such official news as might reach us by those mysterious vibrations which came through the "loud speaker." Even now it seemed to me unbelievable.

"The Savoy Havana Band has just played——"

Lettice and Mervyn were taking advantage of that band. They had kicked the rugs away and were dancing, rhythmically, with charming grace, at the far end of the library. Now and again they came near to us, doing funny things with their feet—"the Charleston," said Lettice—and at these times my beautiful niece smiled at me over her brother's shoulder and glanced comically at her father who hated this dancing and mentioned the fact once or twice, as though for the first time.

"Can't you sit down and read a book, Lettice?"

"No, daddy dear. I prefer to keep moving."

"This is a very critical evening for England," said her father. "There's something disgusting in all that fox-trotting."

"It won't help Mr. Baldwin, daddy dear, if I stop dancing," said Lettice.

"It won't help those damned delegates to make up their fatuous minds," said Mervyn.

"The Savoy Havana Band——"

All over England, in hundreds of thousands of homes, the nation was sitting up listening to that syncopated music while they waited for this fateful news; in homes like this, far away from the hunger-line; in miners' cottages where anxious wives could not go to bed before they knew whether their men would work next day; in mean streets where factory workers, railwaymen, dockers, the great world of labour which made the wheels of life go round, waited for orders as to whether they should go on working or stand idle while those wheels slowed down, and stopped.

"The Savoy Havana Band has just played——"

The music faded out. We could hear the murmur of voices in that London restaurant sixty miles away, the light laughter of a gay lady, the swish of feet on polished floors; then silence.

"Another announcement!" cried Lettice, kneeling on a footstool before the loud speaker, with her hands clasped like a prayerful maiden. "What's the betting, Mervyn?"

"Called off," said Mervyn. "These things always end in an anti-climax."

My sister Helen looked up from her cross-word puzzle with her pencil poised. Southlands held a pawn over the chess

board, and it trembled a little before he threatened my Queen.

"London calling the British Isles."

There was no further news yet. The Conference was still sitting. There was a great crowd assembled in Downing Street. If any official announcement were made, it would be broadcast immediately and repeated at a quarter past eleven.

"Oh, hell!" said Mervyn. He lit a cigarette and kicked a footstool out of the way before sinking into a deep armchair with his legs outstretched.

"Steady, old boy!" said Lettice.

"It looks bad," said his father. "I can't see any hope of settlement. The Trades Union Council has been captured by the Bolsheviks. They don't *want* to settle. They're out for social revolution and the ruin of England."

I spoke of the moderation of the Labour leaders, men like Thomas, who were conducting the negotiations. They were not revolutionary. They were working only in the interests of the miners, faced with a scale of wages below a decent subsistence level, as everyone admitted.

"I don't admit it," said Southlands impatiently.

"Baldwin does," I reminded him.

"Baldwin is a sentimentalist," said Southlands. "These miners have been enjoying inflated wages at the expense of other trades. I'm all for fair play to working men—it has been the policy of Anthony Wingfield and Sons for half a century—but one can't pay high wages so long as coal is produced at a loss. The men had their share of prosperity in good times. Now they must take their share of adversity in bad times. The Royal Commission has brought out all the facts. They have to be faced."

"On both sides!" I said. "By owners as well as men."

I argued that the greatest sacrifice ought to be made by those who could best afford it. There was not much of a margin in miners' cottages. A shilling or two off their wages would mean less bread and less baccy. They were being asked to cut more than a shilling or two. If they accepted the new scale of wages it would mean a distinct lowering of their standard of life. They would be on the poverty line again.

"It's a bargaining standard," said my brother-in-law. "In certain districts——"

We argued from different angles of vision. All my sympathy was on the side of the miners. My brother-in-law was obsessed with the political aspect of the problem and smelled Bolshevism, rankly. On the technical side his knowledge of the mining industry outweighed my attempts to suggest solutions. It was all too intricate for a lay judgment.

"You two!" said Helen, laughing at us. "If you lose your tempers, as I'm sure you will, I shall go to bed and get the news to-morrow. . . . Can anyone tell me another word for 'cryptic'? Eleven letters."

"*The Savoy Havana Band has just played——*"

"God help us!" murmured my brother-in-law under his breath.

His nerves were getting frazzled by that awful jazz.

As every quarter of an hour passed the music faded out again. The voice of the announcer gave the news that there was no news. The best he could tell us was that the Conference was still sitting.

Helen went to bed when my brother-in-law accused me—quite unjustly—of being a slippery sentimentalist infected with socialistic poison. She kissed her hand to us, after giving her cheek to Lettice and Mervyn.

"I want my beauty sleep," she explained.

"Sleep or no sleep, you're a lovely lady," said Lettice.

Then, at last, news came. It was when Mervyn had dozed off in the deep armchair and Lettice was curled up on the floor by his side, with her head against his legs. The voice of the announcer was very grave. There was a thrill of emotion in it. Something serious had happened. There had been a strike of printers in the *Daily Mail*. They had refused to print the paper because they objected to its leading article. The news had been conveyed to the Government, who regarded it as an attack upon freedom of opinion. Negotiations had broken down completely, just as a settlement seemed to be in sight. The General Strike had begun. He ended with words which were a prayer for England's sake.

Lettice had unclasped her hands and uncoiled herself. She

was on her feet now, listening with tense excitement. As she stood there with her head on one side, in her evening frock, so slim, so exquisite, I thought not of her beauty then but, strangely enough, of an August night twelve years before, when girls like that, the girlhood of England, had waited up for news of something happening in the world which would alter their lives, and call them to great adventure, and end their loves—so many of them—by tragic death. They had played up well, those wartime girls—most of them, and millions of them. They had revealed unexpected reserves of courage, never failing. They had served England in all manner of ways, in fields and factories and hospitals and canteens. Would these post-war girls play up like that if there were to be another call for courage, and service, and sacrifice—these Lettices with their shingled hair and knee-short frocks, and spirit of revolt from all authority? . . .

Lettice was listening to those broadcast messages. The Home Secretary was speaking. He was calling to the loyalty of the nation, to its spirit of law and order. The essential services of the country would be safeguarded, he said. The Government would take all measures for the protection of loyal citizens. . . .

Lettice had her head raised. Her lips were parted a little. When she turned round suddenly her eyes were very bright and sparkling.

"We'll beat them!" she said. "If it's revolution, I'm in the middle of it—for any kind of job."

Mervyn stretched his legs and yawned loudly.

"Any news?" he asked, from his deep armchair.

"General Strike," said Lettice. "We've got to get busy."

I saw Southlands looking at his son curiously, with a kind of doubt, almost contemptuously, as though wondering whether this elegant young man could be persuaded to get busy for anything on earth, except a jazz band.

"We can hardly expect Mervyn to do anything like work," he said, with an irony which I thought was too bitter.

Mervyn was silent for a moment. I saw him glance at his father with a faint smile.

"It may surprise you to know, sir," he said quietly, "that

I've put my name down for anything that's wanted by the O.M.S., scavenging, engine-driving, despatch-carrying, stoking——"

"You have!" said Southlands, looking startled and incredulous.

"Of course," said Lettice. "Mervyn's not a shirker when the country wants him."

"Oh, I'm not bucking," said Mervyn, with a slight embarrassment at this sisterly tribute. "It's only because I dislike the idea of being governed by Comrade Chick and his Moscow-fed friends. . . . By the by, I suppose I can get breakfast at half-past seven to-morrow morning?"

"Half-past seven!" exclaimed Southlands. "Good heavens, old lad!"

It was generally half-past ten before Mervyn was wont to descend to the breakfast-table—in pyjamas and dressing-gown, after a late night in town.

Mervyn winked slightly at me, as though to say, "I startled the old man that time."

"Yes," he said, casually. "I have to report at headquarters by nine o'clock."

"I'll see that breakfast's ready, if I have to get it myself," said my brother-in-law.

He went over to his son with an expression of intense satisfaction.

"Well done, Mervyn, old boy. The Wingfields have always played up for England's sake."

Mervyn stretched himself and yawned.

"Well," he said, languidly, "I hope England will play up for the Wingfields' sake. . . . Who's for bed?"

Lettice and I went upstairs together, while her father turned the lights out and locked the doors with his usual methodical care.

Outside her bedroom, Lettice spoke to me in a low voice.

"Uncle, what's it going to mean—this General Strike? Red revolution? Mob-terror and all that? Is my little throat in danger?"

She put her hands up to her throat, as though to make sure it was still safe.

"Stuff and nonsense!" I exclaimed, and I felt a chill down my spine.

"Oh, I'm not funkng it," she said. "On the contrary, I think I'm going to enjoy myself. . . . A real purpose in life. . . . Danger. . . . The thrill of adventure. . . . Service for England's sake, or any old sake. It's what we've been waiting for. All of us."

"Who?" I asked, rather mystified.

"The younger crowd," she explained. "The Glad Young Things!"

"I hope you'll be disappointed," I told her, and patted her hand before she slipped into her room, kissing good-night to me from the tips of her fingers.

"What's it going to mean?" she had asked—"this General Strike."

When I went into my own bedroom I asked the question of myself and could not answer it. Who could tell what forces of evil and anarchy would be let loose by this industrial conflict? With millions of men idle in our great cities, with all its machinery of life at a standstill, with a spirit of anarchy stirring throughout the country, with dangerous leaders—on both sides—and many causes of passion and hatred, there was no knowing what would happen. The whole country would be like a powder magazine ready for explosion if a match were fired. It was impossible to believe that there would not be rioting, mob violence, looting, lawlessness. If this General Strike were to last any length of time, the food supplies of the people would run short. There would be hunger in the mean streets, and hungry men would be desperate men. The Government would put down disorder ruthlessly. It would be bound to do so with all the forces at its command. Machine-gun fire opened on a mob of rioters might set all the nation aflame. Anything might happen. Dreadful things. What did we know of the temper of the people since the war? How could we estimate the forces of all that revolutionary propaganda which had been spread about openly, and secretly, in our industrial strongholds? We were all in the dark. The next few days would reveal us to ourselves, our old qualities of good-nature and self-discipline, or new qualities of cruelty

and lawlessness. There could be no sitting on the fence any more for men like myself. We must be on one side or the other now. This General Strike was a threat against Constitutional Government. There could be no argument about that. The Trades Union Council had issued a challenge to the Government. Surrender to the weapon of a general strike would mean the end of Parliamentary methods. We should be ruled by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress—by Comrade Chick and his colleagues. It would be the Soviet system established in England, and in liaison with Moscow. That to me was unthinkable. Whatever arguments there had been on the side of the miners—and there were many, I thought—they went down before this ultimatum to constitutional authority. The thing would have to be smashed, even if it led to civil war and many horrors. . . . Civil war? . . . No, even now I refused to believe in it. Our people had not lost their old qualities, their common sense, their humour, their self-discipline. Revolutionary members of the Trades Union Council had captured a machine which would not work if they tried to incite the labouring classes to cruelty and violence. They were using a weapon which would be broken by the spirit of the nation rallying in defence of liberties gained through centuries of struggle. That was my faith.

I went to the window of my bedroom and looked out into the garden. It was May the First, the date for which Comrade Millions of them had jeopardised their means of livelihood by garden and in this countryside. The earth smelled damp, and there was a faint sweet scent of wallflowers below my window. In a lilac tree below the terrace a nightingale was answering the four piping notes of its mate, with little liquid gurglings, and once a fine burst of ecstasy for love and life. All over England—and Scotland—and Wales—millions of men and women had gone to bed this night with apprehension as to what would happen when daylight came and the days that followed. Millions of them had jeopardised their means of livelihood by some strange, mistaken loyalty to a leadership which had made them break faith with other loyalties by broken contracts, by this challenge to their fellow citizens. . . . To this had we come, after the agony of war and those years of common sacri-

fice and comradeship. How incurable was the folly of human nature! Must there always be strife between the nations, and within the nations, when a little common sense, a little compromise, a spirit of justice and charity, would avoid such violations of Christian ethics? Had democracy failed—as Elizabeth's brother had told his audience?

XXXVII

MERVYN gave me a lift in his car up to town and dropped me at Piccadilly Circus. He had an overload of passengers when he arrived in London, having picked up five on the way, between Esher and Wimbledon. They were all shop girls on their way to work, in short frocks and high-heeled shoes, having gone to their usual stations with a vague hope that trains would be running in spite of this "silly old strike," as they called it. There were no trains. That undeniable fact was the first visible sign to an incredulous nation that this General Strike was actually going to interfere with the ordinary routine of their life, cutting off their lines of communication between home and office, and upsetting all those normal means of contact with their fellow beings which they had learnt to take for granted like the laws of nature. As we approached London we saw amazing scenes. Immense crowds of office workers had gathered outside the stations and on the pavements, looking utterly bewildered. Some of them seemed to be waiting with misguided optimism for their usual omnibuses and tram-cars, as though at any moment they might come along as they had always come along, a little late, perhaps, but surely. But there was no clang of an approaching tram, no sign of a general omnibus. These city workers from the outer suburbs started walking those six, seven, and eight miles, briskly, as though determined to be up to time as near as possible. Thousands of little high-heeled shoes made a tattoo on the hard pavements. Those pretty "flappers" of the London suburbs strode out gallantly, joining groups of their own sisterhood, chattering and laughing as though after all this were going to be a great joke. City clerks, office boys, shop assistants, commercial travellers, walked at a hard pace which later on the journey slackened down to a slower rhythm of tired feet. There was an endless tide of motor-cars as we neared

London, though nothing like the vast numbers which streamed along the roads on following days, when every old creak of pre-war type was brought out, if it could move at all with any hope of arriving anywhere. They were stormed and boarded by stranded pedestrians who came dashing out of the walking tide with eager eyes and unspoken appeals. I noticed that the girls were always there first. They were picked up by city gentlemen being driven to town in Daimlers and Rolls-Royces, or by young men like Mervyn in two-seaters which became four-seaters or six-seaters.

"Hop in there! . . . Oh, thanks awfully! . . . I'm afraid we can't take any more, unless you like to sit on my lap. . . . Oh, rather! if you don't mind."

I overheard these dialogues as we slowed down and came to a dead halt now and then in the slow-moving traffic on the other side of Putney Bridge. There was a young person in pink sitting on my own lap. Mervyn had two girls squeezed next to him on the front seat, so tightly that he could hardly steer. There were two in the dicky behind. My little person became communicative as the journey proceeded. She was a typist in a publishing office—"three guineas a week, and frightfully interesting work." She had a brother in a motor garage near Covent Garden. He had volunteered to drive a lorry with food supplies from the London Docks. He had been an officer in the great war. "The M.C. and all that." He thought there might be a revolution in England. So many Bolshies about! Personally she thought it was all rather a joke. Broke the monotony of things a bit. She was very sorry for all those girls who couldn't get a lift. This was a bit of luck for her.

Every now and then she laughed a little on my lap. I could see nothing of her but the tip of her ear and a fair curl of hair under a *cloche* hat. She seemed to be amused by the squadrons of bicycles with young men pedalling through the traffic and girls standing on the steps behind and holding on to the shoulders of their cavaliers.

"Well, that's one way of going to work!" she said. "I call it risky. I prefer motoring myself!"

Furniture vans, greengrocers' carts, open lorries, were laden

with these city clerks and shop girls, who swarmed on to them like flies on a jam-pot, with squeals of laughter and careless display of silk stockings. Some of the girls dangled their legs over the tail boards of tradesmen's carts. They were all highly amused with this adventure, it seemed. So far this General Strike was not taken seriously. There was no sign of Red Revolution between Putney Bridge and Piccadilly Circus.

One sign scrawled in chalk on wooden boards outside news-agents' shops struck me as a sinister announcement which would have an astonishing effect upon national life. *No papers printed*. For the first time in our experience of life we should be cut off from all news of what was happening in the world and in our own country. Revolution might have broken out in the North, in Wales, in the East End of London, but there would be no means of knowing it unless one had one's ear to a "loud speaker." Even then, it would be only such news as the Government allowed to be known. They had already notified their control of this broadcasting which would replace the printed word. As a literary man with an incurable habit of reading print to keep in touch with the drama of life, this sense of being deprived of news was uncanny and almost horrible. Those Trades Union leaders who were challenging constitutional government by this weapon of the General Strike had been quick to adopt the methods of Soviet Russia. By calling out the printers, they had stifled the freedom of the Press and cut off the transmission of news. The nation would be at the mercy of wild rumour—highly dangerous in this time of nervous apprehension and social upheaval.

I parted with Mervyn at an island in Piccadilly Circus. The little lady on my lap thanked me prettily. Mervyn appeared to be on comradely terms with the two girls next to him, and they were fixing up a meeting for some date after the strike.

"Good luck, Mervyn!" I said to that nephew of mine.

He gave me a friendly grip over the steering wheel.

"So long, uncle! Next time we meet I shall be a horny handed son of toil. Strange! . . . Strange!"

The thought did not seem to worry him. I think he was looking forward to his chance of new experience. It would be a great adventure for him—an honest day's work!

XXXVIII

IT was at Elizabeth's house that I kept in touch with news, very meagre at first, and alarming. She had a "loud speaker" in her drawing-room, and she and I sat near it hour after hour until late at night, listening to bulletins called out by announcers acting under Government orders. They were reading official notices from the Home Secretary and from a new authority called the Chief Civil Commissioner, who seemed to have powers of dictatorship on all matters connected with the essential services of national life. One thing at least was reassuring. The Government had not been caught napping by this attack upon the social system, and this menace to our food supplies. That mysterious organisation known as the O.M.S.—Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies—which I confess I had ridiculed as a kind of Fascist body, was already functioning with great rapidity and success. It had enrolled thousands of volunteers as lorry drivers, engineers, dock labourers, special constables, and workers of all kinds. A milk depôt had been established in Hyde Park, to which all deliveries of milk were to be sent for distribution in London. Transport for the feeding of the great city had been provided under adequate protection. Amateur engine drivers and signal men were already prepared to organise an elementary train service on some of the main lines. . . . All this was satisfactory to people like myself who believed that this General Strike must be beaten, and quickly beaten, if the nation were not to surrender to a group of revolutionary leaders who had captured moderate labour and its political machine. But what was not reassuring, what was to me extremely alarming, in spite of all my carefully controlled optimism, was the Government's grave view of the situation and its preparation for possible civil conflict. There could be no other meaning attached to the urgent calls for recruits made by the Home Secretary over

that wireless instrument. Every district in the country was enrolling special constables. Fifty thousand more were demanded within twenty-four hours for London. The nation was being divided into two camps—the middle classes on one side, the labouring classes on the other. From friends of mine I heard of great military and naval activity. The power stations upon which the electrical energy of the nation depended were being worked by naval ratings. The Docks, deserted of all labourers, were guarded by troops. Machine-gun sections had been posted at strategical points. Battalions of Tanks were moving up to London from the Aldershot direction.

"The Government has the wind up," said Elizabeth. "It's that fat brat Winston Churchill. The Napoleonic touch. I daresay he's frightening poor Mr. Baldwin to fiddle-strings—and it's all ridiculous. The strikers are as quiet as lambs, poor dears."

"All this seems to me a bit excessive," I admitted. "Still, we can't take risks. We don't know what may happen when the first shot is fired."

"There's not going to be a first shot," said Elizabeth, "unless somebody loses his head—some little Jack-in-office with his nerves out of order."

I shook my head doubtfully.

"There are millions of idle men, and some of them out for trouble. Ugly incidents are bound to happen. We're not a nation of archangels."

"No," said Elizabeth cheerfully, "but we're not a nation of imbeciles."

Her wonderful cheerfulness, her sturdy faith in the good humour of the people, her refusal to believe in revolution of any kind, helped to confirm my own optimism, even against my judgment and reason. Day after day I paid visits to that loud speaker of hers, and always when I heard the announcement "London calling the British Isles" I had a thrill of apprehension lest frightful things might have happened overnight. But always there was the same amazing tale of quietude in all districts, hardly broken by scuffles with the police, a baton charge here and there, and the riotous behaviour of hooligan

boys in some of the slums of London and the north. The Red Flag had not been hoisted on Glasgow Town Hall. The Clyde was quiet. Wales was behaving like a nation of Sunday School teachers. In one of the worst districts down there where once I had seen some violent outbreaks of mob passion the strikers were arranging football matches with police constables. In the English coal fields the miners were whitewashing their cottages, cultivating flowers in their front gardens, playing football, racing whippets. Could it possibly last? Was it in human nature to have a General Strike without violence of any kind? What were the Reds doing? So far they had not shown their noses. Even Comrade Chick was remarkably quiet, and his speeches, according to extracts read over the wireless, showed a disposition to keep on the right side of the law regarding sedition and incitement to mutiny. Had they been paralysed by the Government preparedness? Were they afraid of the forces they had unleashed, unknown forces in which they might be overwhelmed?

"Elizabeth," I asked one evening, "what on earth induced those labour friends of yours—moderate men like Herbert Bradshaw—to lend themselves to this monstrous insult to their own intelligence? They were all against the General Strike, but now they haven't the pluck to disown it and repudiate the men who have dragged them into this fearful mess."

Elizabeth looked distressed. I fancy she was rather disturbed in her allegiance to the Labour Party which she had adopted lately. She put up a rather poor defence.

"It's loyalty to their own side. Mistaken loyalty, as I must confess. I've been calling them all sorts of names in private, and they take it meekly. They hate this strike as much as I do. Ramsey Macdonald goes about like a haunted man, poor dear, with a dark melancholy in his beautiful eyes."

"Conscience-stricken!" I said, cruelly. "Why doesn't he come out like a man and tell the Trades Union Council to stop this criminal folly—against which he warned them before it happened? Instead of that, he attacks the Government for doing the very things which in his heart he knows are justified and right."

"The game of politics," answered Elizabeth weakly. "Isn't it played like that?"

"It's a rotten game," I said. "Between the lot of them England will go down. Where's that spiritual leadership we have all been waiting for?"

Elizabeth was silent for a minute or two. When she answered I admired her honesty and laughed at her humour.

"I hate to confess it," she said, "but I have a sneaking admiration for that man Baldwin—Conservative though he is. I think I'll have to vote for him next time unless I watch myself very carefully. He's the best Socialist in England—if one can believe a word he says."

Certainly the Conservative Prime Minister during those days of peril—for they were perilous—expressed as far as any man could, and rather nobly, the best instincts of our national character. It was his call of "Keep steady!" his pledge of honour to see fair play, his resolution to uphold authority and law, his liberal and kindly sentiment, not warped by the necessity of maintaining order, his apparent strength and simplicity and candour, which compelled the admiration of all moderate-minded men and women, and did something, it is certain, to take the bitterness out of this national conflict with organised labour.

XXXIX

DURING those ten days of the General Strike I had a growing admiration for the temper of the English people, and an insatiable curiosity to see and understand this national manifestation of patience, self-discipline, and good humour. There was something rather mysterious in it, something rather baffling, but splendid. The thrill of the first day's excitement must have worn off rapidly for all those millions of city workers who had come from the outer suburbs. The of city workers who had come from the outer suburbs. The adventure of it must have dulled down on rainy nights, for instance, when those silk-stockinged girls had to fight for places on open lorries and tradesmen's carts and then, when every vehicle was overcrowded, had to trudge homewards, tired, bedraggled, mud-splashed. Yet day after day they stuck to it gamely, and never once did I see a sign of ill-temper, never once heard a word of anger or passion against the strikers who had caused all this.

In the west of London there were crowds of cars put at the disposal of the pedestrians—though never enough—by private owners. But east of Aldgate there were few cars of any kind and almost no omnibuses were running to any of those vast districts beyond—Stratford and East Ham and Walthamstow, with their miles of mean streets far away from central London. Several times I made my way down there to watch the tide of humanity flowing eastwards. Thousands of them clambered on to any vehicle on wheels which had a vacant place. One party of girls travelled gaily in a hearse which had changed its usual load of death for this pack of laughing life. Tradesmen's carts were overweighted and broke down under the strain of this passenger service without limit of numbers. Thousands of young men and women walked along the rain-swept pavements, arm in arm, in gangs, or flitting on alone, little hurrying figures anxious for the warm rooms which awaited them at the far end of tramway lines, where no trams were running.

In the Commercial Road, Whitechapel, I took shelter under a shop front when the rain was heavy for half an hour, and I spoke to a man standing there with his hands in his pockets, staring moodily across the street.

"Any trouble down here?" I asked.

Not far from where we stood were some of the worst streets in London, where there had been some rioting and baton charges by the police.

The man glanced at me sideways, and then spat on the pavement.

"I ain't looking for trouble myself," he said. "If you want it, I dessay you can find it all right."

"I don't!" I told him with a laugh.

He spoke again, after a short silence.

"There's some gangs of young 'ooligans upsetting cars and all that. Not a man on strike among the lot of them. All the trouble there is comes from young fellers what 'ave never done a decent day's work in their lives. And never want to neither."

He pulled out a clay pipe and sucked it, empty as it was, until I offered him a cigarette, which he accepted with a "thank you kindly."

That little gift seemed to loosen his tongue.

"I'm a striker myself," he told me. "'Ad to be, you know, though I was getting good wages. The Union said 'Out you come, boys!'—and out we came. Solidarity of Labour an' all that. I can't see much in it myself. Being no politician."

"How long is it going to last?" I asked.

The man gave a short laugh.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you know as much as I do, and that's nothing. You can't believe a word what comes over the wireless, in my 'umble opinion. Government propergander. We 'ad some of that in the war. No more can you believe a word what comes from Labour officials. Propergander again. Where's the truth? Ay, that's what I'd like to know. We're fighting in the bloody dark, the rank and file of us. We're all in No Man's Land, and there ain't no Verrey Lights this time."

He seemed to see some grim humour in that remark. He was thinking back to Flanders, when there was another kind of war.

XL

IT was on the fifth day of the strike that I had a meeting with Ivo Tremayne, who was Lettice's friend. It was on a 'bus going down Knightsbridge. I had been watching a stream of 'buses flowing westward to Piccadilly. They were being driven and conducted by young men from Universities and public schools—mostly in plus fours and knitted pull-overs—with a policeman on the driver's seat. Legends in white chalk were scrawled over the splash-boards.

*"Pretty Flappers free of charge:
Others Threepence all the way."*

"Please don't stop me. I can't start again!"

One of them, with broken window panes, due to stone-throwing in Whitechapel, advertised itself as the best ventilated 'bus in London. Another, damaged in the same way, uttered a plaintive note to the passers-by.

"All my pains have gone, dear mummy!"

The young conductors were obviously enjoying themselves. They stood on their footboards inviting customers, as the 'buses slowed down at the stopping places.

"Step up, ladies and gentlemen. Money no object. Travel on top and see the sights of London!"

One boy gave a helping hand to a hesitating lady.

"Do you go anywhere near Oxford Circus?" she asked.

"Well, we don't as a rule," said the boy. "But we will, if you'd like to."

It was then that I saw Ivo Tremayne. He was driving an omnibus labelled for Hendon, and was chatting with the police-

man by his side. His felt hat was thrust to the back of his head. He wore a blue serge suit with his old Magdalen tie, and he beamed upon the world as though he loved it.

"Hullo, Ivo!" I exclaimed. "Going citywards, by any chance?"

"Straight as an arrow," he said. "Hop up, sir. Plenty of room on the front seat, if Robert will squeeze up a bit."

I sat next to him, and asked for news.

"Nothing very exciting," he told me. "A little bottle-throwing, east of Aldgate, but not enough to put the wind up. I laid out one of the Reds with my own right hand. I hated to hurt him, poor little worm!"

The policeman nudged me and laughed, as though there were more in it than that.

"A regular mob," he said. "This young gentleman jumped into the middle of them. Very rash it seemed to me."

"They ran like rabbits," said Ivo. "No spirit in them at all."

He leaned down over his apron and spoke to a girl standing on the kerb-stone.

"A charming 'bus this. Can I take you anywhere?"

"I'd like to go to Bond Street," she said, laughing up at him. "Is that your route?"

"We try to please our customers," said Ivo politely. "The other day I found myself at Hampstead when I was booked for Balham. You never can tell!"

The boy behind rang the bell, and we started off down Knightsbridge at a great speed. I gave a gasp when, without the slightest warning, Ivo made a swerve round a street lamp, steered into the entrance of Rutland Gate, and pulled up outside Elizabeth's house.

"Excuse me a moment," he said. "I want to leave a letter for Lettice. She's doing canteen work somewhere, and I'm not sure of her address."

He jumped down from the omnibus, leapt up the steps of Elizabeth's house and touched the bell. While he waited for the door to open he took the opportunity of lighting a cigarette from a silver case which I had seen before. It was a present from Lettice. I glanced through the window behind at the

passengers inside. They were watching Ivo with astonishment mingled with amusement and admiration. These unconventional ways with London 'buses were a new experience for all of them. The whole of this General Strike was a new experience, utterly fantastic.

Ivo handed in his letter, but there was further delay. Elizabeth's butler whispered something, and a few minutes later came out with a glass of sherry and a biscuit on a silver salver. Ivo drank the sherry at one gulp and came back munching the biscuit.

At the door of his omnibus he addressed his passengers.

"So sorry! . . . I didn't have breakfast this morning. . . . I'll do a bit of speed work to make up for lost time."

He mounted his seat again, and took his steering-wheel with smiling satisfaction, and did a bit of speed-work which raised my back hair.

"Is this an omnibus," I asked, "or a Rolls-Royce?"

"It's a great joke," he answered.

Yes! it was a great joke to all those young men and women of the middle classes who had made a rush to the recruiting stations for any kind of service in this time of social danger. To them it was an amusing adventure, an agreeable break in the routine of Universities and public schools and office work and legal studies. They retained their social status by outward and visible signs—those plus fours and fancy ties and tasselled stockings—and did not lose caste by driving 'buses or sweeping out station yards or unloading vessels at the docks or covering themselves with oil and grease as stokers and engine drivers. The dirtier their work, the more they saw the humour of it, knowing that in a little while they would be back again in pleasant homes, in well-cut clothes, among their own crowd. I saw some truth in the sarcasm of David Swayne, whom I met at the corner of Eccleston Square, where the Trade Union Council had its headquarters—the G.H.Q. of this industrial war. He looked shabby, as usual, and there were dark lines under his eyes, as though he were in need of sleep. He tried to avoid me, I think, but I stopped him, and put my hand on his arm.

"Tell me! What does moderate Labour think of all this business, David? How's it going to end?"

He looked at me rather sullenly for a moment, but then, remembering, perhaps, some pleasant hours passed in my rooms before Jocelyn's election fight, answered civilly enough, but with his usual irony and class consciousness.

"Oh, Labour will be beaten—of course. The snob instinct of the English people is still all-powerful!"

"Meaning what?" I asked.

David Swayne laughed rather bitterly, and stared at a heavy lorry labelled "Food Supplies Only," driven by a young gentleman in flannel trousers and a college blazer.

"All the laddies in plus fours are rushing to take the jobs of working men and defend the sacred rights of wealth and caste."

"To defend constitutional liberty," I answer gravely.

"Yes," said David, gloomily. "It's very wrong of miners to want a living wage. It's very naughty of the working classes to stand by their comrades with sacrifice and loyalty. Labour must work and be damned to it, or the nobility and gentry of this democratic land will jolly well see they do, with machine-guns and tanks. All the nice, well-bred boys will act as black-legs and strike-breakers, with a noble sense of duty and a cheery sense of humour."

"I take off my hat to them," I said. "They're perfectly splendid. It's not a fight against Labour, David—and you know it. It's a fight against a little group of theoretical revolutionaries—ignorant fanatics—who have captured the Trade Unions and forced this challenge against the Constitution and all our liberties. They don't care a curse for the miners or the working classes. What they are out for is personal power and class hatred."

"I see you read the *Morning Post*," said David Swayne, with polite irony. "You must have missed it lately."

Then suddenly the ironical mood broke down and he spoke with emotion and candour.

"Forgive my bitterness, sir! To tell you the truth, I'm tortured by this General Strike. It's a hideous outrage against

all my political convictions, and moderate Labour. But what can we do? We can't act against our own crowd. We can't see them beaten in their struggle to maintain a decent standard of life. All my sympathies are with the miners. I've been one of them. I wish to God I were one of them now, instead of a half-baked intellectual with divided views."

There was a suspicion of moisture in his eyes. He turned away from me, and walked slowly into Ecclestone Square, where he had some job in the headquarters of that General Strike which he regarded as "a hideous outrage" against all that he had read and thought as a student of history and political science.

XLI

I TOO was divided in my sympathies. I did not waver about the absolute necessity of smashing the General Strike, at all costs, but behind that conviction was the uneasy thought that the mine owners had been as truculent, as narrow, as obstinate, as the miners' leaders, not revealing any large-hearted and generous spirit, but manœuvring for position, creating suspicion and hostility by their public manifestoes and official propaganda and trying to force down wages below a decent subsistence level after making great profits in the war and selling coal to war-stricken nations—like France—at fantastic and fraudulent prices. The men were being asked for considerable sacrifice. Was it going to be equally shared by the masters? Would they give up one cigar or one expensive motor-car? . . . This General Strike was a hideous outrage, as young David said, but there was something also in what he said about the loyalty of the working classes who come out on strike not for ignoble and greedy motives of their own, but for the sake of comrades in the mines threatened with a lowered standard of life. There was something wonderful and noble in the way in which millions of men gave up their wages and went on strike pay—not very much compared with their weekly earnings—for an ideal of loyalty beyond self-interest. We could not believe now that there was any revolutionary purpose in the minds of the rank and file. They had not behaved according to the code of revolution. They had behaved throughout the country, with very few exceptions, as law-abiding men, not out for trouble, avoiding conflict, maintaining an admirable self-discipline.

It was in the neighbourhood of the London Docks that I had one of those street-corner conversations which gave me an insight into the minds of our working men—no longer working but paralysing the whole country by their inactivity.

In the old days it had been the worst district in London, with

many streets where even the police had been afraid to go. As a young man in search of adventure I had seen some ugly riots down there, and brutal scenes. Now, when not a single docker was working, when those miles of docks were crowded with shipping laden with cargoes from all the ports of the world, untouched except by a few gangs of volunteers—medical students, university men and ex-officers—there was an uncanny quietude outside the dock gates, and no sign of trouble. I enquired the way to the Dock entrance from a group of men standing under an archway. They were out-of-work dockers—the strikers—and one of them volunteered to walk with me.

"You can't get in without a permit," he said. "There's a regiment of Guards inside; and strangers ain't admitted."

"I know the commanding officer," I explained.

The man glanced at me sideways, with a new respect.

"I daresay you've been an officer yourself," he suggested. "In the war, I wouldn't be surprised. I was there myself. The London Division. . . . Ypres, the Somme, every old thing, till I got a machine-gun bullet in my lung. A full sergeant before I'd done with the job."

He spoke rather well, and was a fine, upstanding man, with clear, honest eyes, I thought.

"And now you're on strike!" I said. "Seems rather a pity doesn't it, for men who fought in the war, for England's sake? It's not going to do the country any good. What's the idea, sergeant?"

He found it difficult to explain. But he was very anxious to explain. We stood under another archway and he argued the matter out, and I could see that he was fumbling at ideas, not altogether clear in his own mind.

"I'm loyal to England," he protested. "I don't forget the war and all that—the spirit of the trenches. The men did damn well, yes, and the officers too. No doubt about it. Died like little gentlemen, poor lads, and lived under shell fire, with lice and filth, without grousing. But what for? That's what I've been asking myself many a time. To save England? Yes. I did my bit. But to save an England worth saving!—for common men and all of us. What's the good of saving a country where the rank and file don't get a fair chance? That's what

I'm worrying about. Those miners, for instance, why should they be beaten down in their wages? It don't seem fair, with their rough work underground. Loyalty, yes. I'm all for it. But there's loyalty to one's fellow men, one's pal. Don't you agree, sir? And there's loyalty to one's Union, *esprit de corps*, as we called it in the battalion. That's why I'm out on this strike. Not because I like it, mind you. I've dropped good wages. I get five pounds a week in the docks, and more when there's lots of work. Now I've dropped to fifteen bob, strike pay. Next week less than that. It don't seem common sense. But there's things higher than common sense. *Esprit de corps* ain't common sense when shells are searching for one's body. It's easier to cut and run and leave the other lads in the lurch. But somehow one doesn't. Not playing the game! It's the same with this 'ere strike. Much easier to be a blackleg and earn good wages and to hell with the miners. But it's not playing the game quite. That's how I look at it. If I make my meaning clear, sir?"

He had made his meaning clear. There was an honest light in the eyes of that out-of-work docker and ex-sergeant of the Royal Fusiliers. I felt abashed by his simplicity and sense of honour. Yet, somehow, there were flaws in his logic.

"If this General Strike were to win," I said, "it would be the ruin of England. The loyalty of you and your fellows to those Trade Union leaders—the Bolshies among them—means disloyalty to the country you saved in time of war. They're leading you into the enemy's camp—Red revolution, Communism, anarchy."

He smiled and shook his head.

"Don't you believe it, sir. There's no more of that muck round the London Docks than you could find in Hyde Park on a Sunday morning. Now and then some of the Reds—long-haired laddies—come down this way trying to convert us to blood and terror. What we want is beer and baccy, and enough to keep our kids decent, with a margin on the rent and the movies for the wife. Red revolution! Why, we dockers are almost too respectable. Like churchwardens. 'Umdrum. I'm a religious man myself. I go to a Baptist chapel on a Sunday morning and 'and the plate round."

We stood outside the dock gates, and he pointed to them and said, "I can't come further than this. Not until the Strike's over."

I held out my hand to him and he gave it a good strong grip. Then he stepped back a pace and saluted as though he were a sergeant again, somewhere in France.

XLII

INSIDE the Docks there was an uncanny silence, broken only by the heavy tread of a sentry—one of the Scots Guards—outside a line of sheds. The police commandant who had been given my card, came with me to the battalion headquarters; he was a cheery old gentleman with a purple face, weathered by long years of service in wind and fog.

“How are things going?” I asked.

He gave a chuckle of amusement as he stared at a long vista of ships’ funnels beyond an iron bridge.

“It depends how you look at it,” he answered. “Nothing’s going in the way of ships and cargoes. Miles and miles of ships held up by this strike, and likely to be here for some time. On the other hand, we’ve had no trouble. Everything’s going well in that way. Amazing, I call it! Why, I remember the great Dock Strike twenty years ago, when there were police charges every day and London ’Orspital was filled with broken heads as fast as the doctors could deal with ’em! Nothing of the sort this time. All the strikers as quiet as lambs, and the police on best terms with all the men. That’s the value of eddication, and a good scale of wages. It take the ’atred out of men’s ’earts.”

“I thought there had been some scuffles down here,” I remarked.

“Gangs of young ’ooligans,” said the old police officer. “Not a striker among them. Young anarchists, eighteen years old, and bad girls inciting them. It’s them young women that’s the worst. They throw things at the soldiers, and use bad language—frightful!—and sing the Red Flag, and screech with laughter, for no cause that I can see. Want an ’iding, that’s what I say. Barring that, no trouble at all down here. Surprisingly quiet.”

He jerked his thumb at a line of warehouses with closed doors.

"We've got to be careful, of course. It wouldn't do to let a mob in here! Millions of pounds' worth of brandy in those sheds. Enough to intoxicate the entire population of London and make 'em mad with fire-water. That's why the Guards are down. A fine body of men! Wonderful discipline!"

"What's the music?" I asked, wondering whether my ears betrayed me. Somewhere or other in those silent and deserted docks a band was playing a selection from "Pinafore."

The police officer laughed heartily.

"Yes, it does seem funny, don't it? The full band of the Scots Guards playing classical music in these old docks. And 'ardly a soul to listen to them. They're doing their bit in time of trouble. Showing a spirit of patriotism, as you might say."

In one of the sheds there I saw that band of the Scots Guards. The bandmaster was beating time with as much solemnity as though to a great audience in one of the public parks. But the only listeners were half a dozen Tommies sitting on a brandy cask with their steel hats awry and their rifles stacked in a corner of the shed. . . .

It was on one of the quaysides, by the side of a gangway leading from the hold of a Danish cargo-boat that I saw a familiar and unexpected face, dirty, dripping with sweat, but very cheerful.

"Hullo, Frank!" I exclaimed. "By all that's wonderful!"

It was Frank Hardy, in a pair of flannel trousers and a loose belt round his waist, and nothing above but a light vest. He was sitting on a pile of wooden cases, surrounded by a group of men, younger than himself and just as dirty and perspiring.

"Not a bad day's work," he said, glancing round at the wooden cases, hundreds of them piled high. "Butter, eggs, and bacon! London won't be starved just yet, thanks to this gang of blacklegs. But it takes the stuffing out of an untrained man. I ache in every muscle of my body!"

The police commandant gazed at this band of volunteers with loud chuckles of mirth and admiration.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I will say this ain't child's play.

It ain't skylarking. It's a damn good day's work for a gang of amateurs, and no mistake about it."

This commendation from a professional critic was received with loud cheers and laughter from the young men round Frank Hardy. They, too, wore nothing but vests and flannel trousers, but through their sweat and grime I saw the Oxford type of face, clean-cut, good-looking, boyish. They were of Jocelyn's type and caste, the post-war youth of England, and as like as peas in a pod to another crowd of youth I had known, twelve years ago, when the country was in danger.

I spent the evening with them, in a long bare room above one of the sheds, with a row of mattresses on the floor and tin wash-basins in between, and a piano at one end of the room—brought up in a lorry—upon which one of these young volunteer dockers hammered out accompaniments to syncopated songs, given in chorus by his comrades. Frank and I sat on a mattress together, getting in a few words of our own between all this racket.

"It's like being back in the Army again," said Frank. "Twelve years wiped out, and the same spirit! See that tall lad over there. He might be the twin brother to the fellow who shared my dug-out at Fricourt on the Somme, before we were blown up by a trench mortar. . . . It makes me feel as old as sin! They know nothing of what happened then, and don't want to hear it much."

We joined in one of the choruses. That tall boy, who happened to be the son of a famous Judge, was dancing the Charleston with a little fellow as graceful as a girl, though Frank told me he was the best boxing man at Cambridge.

"Frank," I said, "you and I were a bit doubtful about these post-war boys, weren't we? They seem to be playing up all right, don't they? The same old spirit of youth!"

"Nothing wrong with them," said Frank. "Clean stuff all through, ready to play the game, as far as they see it, when the call comes—and no grousing at hard work. If there's been anything like Civil War——"

He did not finish his sentence, but broke off sharply and stared at the bowl of his pipe with a thoughtful smile.

There was another chorus—that infernal tune, "It ain't goin'

to rain no mo', no mo'." Frank joined in with a pretty good baritone.

"Frank," I said presently, "you were right about that revolution. It's not going to happen this time."

"Never will," said Frank. "I know the working man and the unemployed, and the down-and-outs. Not all the Reds in the world can get the touch of cruelty into them. It's their sense of humour. Unbeatable!"

"I thought you were on their side," I remarked, after a moment's hesitation. It was a remark I had wanted to make for some time. I was anxious for his answer. It might strengthen my own convictions and settle some of my haunting doubts.

He did not answer immediately, but puffed that foul old pipe of his, sitting there on a mattress with his knees up.

Another chorus from post-war youth made the rafters shake.

"It's because I'm on their side," said Frank, "that I've joined this gang of strike-breakers—these children from the Universities. We've got to smash this General Strike for the sake of the men who are being led—by silly swine—towards ruin and damnation. If this General Strike goes on, it's going to mean another tide of unemployment and a ghastly wave of misery for the rank and file. It's going to play into the hands of reaction. Our little Winstons are longing for Dictatorship. Our little militarists will be vastly disappointed if there's no machine-gun work and no use for Tanks. I don't want them to get the chance. I want to see this business called off by those damn fools who have betrayed the cause of Labour and duped the working men by calling to their loyalty—before the first shot is fired and the first mob is trampled down by mounted Bobbies. See my point of view?"

I held out my hand to him and gripped his tight, and there was something in my throat which prevented words.

Before I left the Docks that night he walked with me as far as the main gate and told me a piece of news which gave me a real sense of joy.

"By the bye," he said, in a casual way, "it may interest you to know that I've fixed it up with Nancy. . . . That's another reason why I want this General Strike to end. Sheer selfish-

ness! She insists upon my marrying her before her next novel comes out. I've got to hold the fort against the Press photographers."

It was in the dark, and I could not see his face, but I heard his quiet laughter, and felt the grip of his hand when I fumbled for it.

"Well done, Nancy!" I said. "And God bless her novels."

"God save England!" said Frank rather gravely.

Looking back on that time, now that the peril has passed—or seems to have passed—this emotion of ours, this sense of England in danger, seems rather overdone, even a little hysterical. And yet there, in those silent Docks, was the menace to our national life, with all those ships waiting for unloading, and only a gang of volunteers to shift the food which the nation needed for its life. Beyond the gates, in every industrial city of England, the wheels of industry had stopped running. Millions of men were standing idle. Our national energy was at a dead halt. Our world trade had been cut off as though by the blockade of an enemy fleet. Our great railway systems were blocked by empty trucks and deserted engines. In this great city of London alone there were latent forces of mob passion which might break loose and lead to anarchy and bloodshed, if the Government failed to ensure the food supplies, or if the population lost, even for an hour or two, its self-control, this marvellous self-discipline which had surprised the world and all of us. Looking back on that General Strike we know now that our unspoken fears were unjustified. But then, for ten days, we did not know what the next hour might reveal. We did not know how steady and how splendid was the spirit of our people in all classes, and on both sides of this social struggle.

XLIII

IT was obvious now that "the extremists," as we called them—that small group of revolutionaries, mesmerised by Moscow, who had forced the pace in the Trade Union Council—funked the weapon which they had forged and drawn. They had no stomach for revolution, though their brains, or what they are pleased to call their brains, were inflamed with its catch words and their own over-heated oratory. Comrade Chick and his kind ran away and hid themselves. Whether they saw that the spirit of the people, including the great mass of strikers, was utterly opposed to revolutionary ideas, or whether they were cowed and frightened by the Government's show of force—those military escorts of food supplies, the new army of "specials" recruited from the middle classes and armed with truncheons, the battalions of Tanks parading the streets of London—it is impossible to say. But they were like school bullies who whined that they "didn't mean it" when threatened with a flogging. From the very beginning moderate Labour leaders—Constitutionalists by conviction—worked desperately behind the scenes to call off the General Strike, at all costs of humiliation. It was not an easy thing to do without betraying the miners to whom they were pledged, and repudiating the miners' delegates who held them to their bond. They showed as much moral courage in calling it off as they had shown moral cowardice in allowing it to happen.

Elizabeth's friend, Herbert Bradshaw—that ex-Cabinet Minister of the Labour Party, whom I had met so often in her rooms and who had supported young Jocelyn in his bye-election—gave me a glimpse of the psychological agonies which men of his type were suffering through this conflict between political intelligence and class prejudice.

I met him one evening as he came out of Elizabeth's house and walked slowly down Knightsbridge with his big hands

clasped behind his back and his head bent. I recognised the shambling figure of this man, whom I rather liked, as he passed a lamp-post at the corner of Hill Street. Two young "specials" in civilian clothes with police badges on their coat-sleeves—part of that army of young men who rolled up in thousands to Scotland Yard to defend law and order against riotous mobs, if they happened to break loose—were strolling up and down, rather bored, I imagine, by a complete absence of adventure in this peaceful district. Down in the East End some of their comrades had had the "luck" of baton charges against gangs of young roughs who had asked for trouble and got it.

"Not much fun in this, old bird," said one of them.

"No. I'd rather be at the Ritz with a pretty girl," said the other. "Not even a comely parlour-maid to invite us down the area! . . . Much over-rated, this policeman's job."

It was after hearing that scrap of dialogue that I came face to face with Herbert Bradshaw, and spoke to him as he stood for a moment on the kerb-stone to let a taxi pass.

"Any news, Bradshaw? How do you sum up the situation?"

He started at the sound of my voice, and seemed to come out of a brown study with an effort.

"The situation?" he repeated, moodily. "It's more like a nightmare than a situation. A blasted madhouse, with homicidal maniacs making faces at each other. . . . Oh, Lord!"

He groaned heavily, and I could see that his face was drawn and that his eyes were darkly puffed, like a sick man's.

"A dreadful business!" I said. "Can't you see a way out?"

He answered with a touch of anger, as though these questions exasperated him.

"There's only one way out. I've been telling it all the time to those damn fools who have got us into this hideous mess. Those penny-plain, twopence-coloured, imitations of Robespierre who think they can play hell with England because they've been elected to the Trades Union Congress by eighteen-year-old boys. There's only one way out. That's to crawl out—on our hands and knees. If this General Strike goes on another week it's going to smash up the whole Trade Union movement, and undo everything we've gained for half a century.

The Government has got the whip hand, and they'll use the whip, and I for one don't blame 'em. Anyone who says this General Strike isn't a threat to the Constitution is either a lunatic or a damn liar. And I'd rather see the Trade Unions broke than the Constitution overthrown. I've always said so. I'm saying it now."

"Well done," I said. "If you could get your colleagues to think so too."

"They think it and know it," he growled, "barring our little neurotics who can't sit still and talk madhouse stuff while their feet get colder and colder and they look for funk-holes for the time when it comes to run away."

He put his big paw on my shoulder, and his voice broke when he spoke again.

"Our 'Erb,' they call me, in the rank and file. I've worked for 'em night and day for twenty years. I've fought their battles, raised their scale of wages, spent myself in the service of the working folk. They were proud of me when I was made a Cabinet Minister in the first Labour Government and went to Windsor and chatted with the King as man to man. 'Our 'Erb!' they said, mighty proud of me. Next week they'll be calling me a traitor and a skunk. They'll accuse me of crawling. They'll think I'm a white-livered swine for letting down the miners. . . . But it's better to let down the miners than let down England. It's better to crawl backwards than walk forward—head up—to disaster, with millions of innocent men and women following on behind, and not a dog's chance of escape from economic ruin. That's God's truth, and I'm going to crawl, though I don't like it."

There were tears in his eyes as he suddenly turned away from me and walked in his slow, shambling way towards a cab rank, where he hailed a taxi and drove off.

I went home to my own rooms in Whitehall Court, pondering over this conversation, and buoyed up with a new hope.

If Herbert Bradshaw had decided to crawl, the General Strike might not last much longer. I said a kind of prayer that he might have the courage to crawl, for England's sake. It needed courage for a man in his position.

XLIV

IN London, after the first week of the General Strike, the outward aspect of life was nearly normal. Omnibuses were running again, with amateur drivers and conductors, along all the chief routes. Train services on local lines were improving hourly, by volunteer effort. Even the newspapers were publishing small sheets—the *Daily Telegraph* and its rivals had withered to the size of pocket-handkerchiefs!—and they supplemented the official *British Gazette*, produced for the Government by the editorial staff of the *Morning Post* working as typesetters and printers, which suppressed the Labour point of view and indulged in propaganda. Main line trains were few and far between and some of those that started, driven by very gallant gentlemen, ran off the rails or blocked the lines. The goods traffic of the country was utterly tied up. The big industries were at a standstill. But the population was able to get about again, and vital services were fully maintained. The motor-car had solved the problem of transport for passengers and food supplies. When so many boys and girls, ex-soldiers and all manner of men, could drive anything with an engine and a steering-wheel, the greatest threat of the General Strike—national starvation—was made ridiculous. Another illusion of life was quickly dispelled. Skilled labour lost some of its prestige. In a mechanical age there were no dark mysteries under the bonnets of motor lorries, in electrical power stations, even in the cabs of powerful railway engines. "This isn't a job for kids," said a disgruntled striker, seeing his motor omnibus brought out of its garage by a boy of eighteen with tasselled stockings. "It's a kid's job!" said the boy, changing gear with a light touch. . . .

Among all those boys and girls—as I still thought of them—it was Jocelyn Pomeroy who interested me most. He seemed to me most unusual in character and with qualities which might

make him a leader of men when he had found himself. As Hardy and I had discovered, he had a touch of spirituality underneath his flippancy. He was in search of his soul, though he had revolted against his father's religious intolerance. He was sensitive to injustice, with "fair play" as his guiding principle, and yet with a certain intellectual coldness and sense of truth which prevented him from accepting the emotional absurdities of the democratic platform on which he had taken his stand as a rebel against his father's tradition and prejudice. His sense of humour, touched by youthful cynicism, held him back from the deep end of social revolution in which he had been tempted to plunge. Comrade Chick had no chance with him. Now, during this General Strike, he had an intellectual struggle which worried him exceedingly, because it raised a point of honour in his mind and faced him with alternate loyalties.

It was after that first day of the Strike, when I had sat up with Elizabeth, listening to her "loud speaker," that I found him waiting for me in my rooms late at night. He was asleep when I entered, and I found him in my cosiest arm-chair, with his legs outstretched and his head turned sideways on the shoulder of the chair, with his fair hair disordered as though he had been thrusting his fingers through it. He stirred and woke, and sat up when I turned another light up and stood smiling down upon him.

"Sorry!" he said. "Is it late? I wanted a yarn with you about this blasted Strike."

"Proud and honoured, Jocelyn. What about a cup of coffee to stimulate our intelligence? I can make it in two minutes."

"Great!" he said. "I walked all the way from David's dog-hole in the Vauxhall Bridge Road. We've had a frightful row. . . . Political differences of a most acute kind! . . . He calls me Judas because I suggested volunteering as a special constable or any job suitable to my muscular ability and refined nature."

I laughed at his way of stating the problem.

"Did you suggest it seriously, or as one of your essays in the art of leg-pulling?"

Jocelyn grinned.

"Yes, I love pulling David's leg. He asks for it so much. But, seriously, I'm rather inclined to become a little gentleman and volunteer on the side of the Snobs. It's all very awkward for a defeated Labour man with leanings towards Constitutional Government and the sacred principles of the ballot-box."

"Exceedingly awkward!" I agreed.

"I feel like Hamlet," said Jocelyn. "'Can I kill my father at his prayers?' Whether it is better to take up arms, and so forth. That is to say, I'm torn between divided loyalties."

"All of us are," I said. "All liberal-minded men."

For an hour or more we talked over the political motives behind the General Strike, and Jocelyn was quite frank about the Trade Union leaders—the 'Extremists'—who had forced the Labour Party into an untenable position.

"I'm fed up with them," he told me. "I'm fed up with the whole damn game. It stinks of hypocrisy and class consciousness. Anyhow, the country seems to matter more than the half-baked theories of Labour leaders who quote Karl Marx without having read him and worship at the shrine of Lenin as the apostle of loving-kindness."

I told him of Frank Hardy's point of view, and it seemed to impress him.

"The curse of it is," he said, later in our argument—so late that Big Ben was booming out one o'clock on a May morning—"all the little reactionaries will be shrieking the chorus of 'I told you so' and 'God bless the Duke of Northumberland!' I quite agree that this General Strike is a challenge to Parliamentary Government—and on the whole I'm inclined to think the old Talking Shop is a pretty good compromise between Mr. Mussolini and Comrade Chick—but I'll hate to see British Snobdom rallying up to down the miners and support his Lordship of Birkenhead and Mr. Winsome Churchill, and my ecclesiastical father. . . . It's all very complicated, don't you think?"

He yawned, and thrust his hands through his hair and threw a cigarette into my fireplace, with an air of nausea.

I stood up and put my hand on his shoulder.

"My advice to you, young fellow, is to have eight hours sleep and put this business out of your head."

"Sound scheme!" he agreed. "I suppose I can doss down on your sofa?"

Before I left him, he asked another question, with a hint of shyness.

"What's Lettice doing these days? Fighting Bolsheviks with a band of gladiators and Ivo Tremayne and the Glad Young Things?"

"Tremayne is running an omnibus to death between Putney and the Bank," I told him. "Lettice is serving sausages and mashed in a canteen for motor drivers somewhere down in Chiswick."

"And old Mervyn?" he said. "I bet he's dancing tangoes with lovely ladies, as usual! No dirty work for the gilded heir of Southlands!"

"On the contrary," I told him. "The last time I saw Mervyn—this very afternoon—he was stoking a train from Paddington to Plymouth. He had ruined a beautiful new suit, and looked like a Lascar."

"Is that so?" asked Jocelyn, looking rather staggered. "It makes me feel rather out of it all. . . . When our little Mervyn turns to toil——"

He made a remark then which I remembered afterwards. It was, in a way, the moral of the whole business.

"It won't do Labour any harm to know that our crowd aren't afraid of dirty work."

He yawned again and said, "Lord, I feel as sleepy as an owl!"

I think he was asleep before I shut the door upon him.

XLV

EVEN now, on the ninth day of the General Strike, the only way of getting the latest news was to keep in touch with those wireless messages which reported the state of affairs in all parts of the country. Things were not going so well, I thought. In spite of Government optimism it seemed to me that passion was beginning to show itself here and there. There had been some rather severe rioting at Edinburgh, Hull, Leeds, and other places. After nine days of nerve-strain, tempers were getting frayed, and mobs of young anarchists—never the older men—were smashing up tram-cars and assaulting volunteer labourers. Was this General Strike approaching a new phase, when the amazing steadiness of the country would be broken up by violence?

So I wondered, rather gloomily, when on the evening of what happened to be the last full day of this episode in English history I walked past Hammersmith, watching the homeward streaming tide—an endless procession of motor traffic—and listening now and then to broadcast announcements made from “loud speakers” placed in shop doorways.

The crowds on the pavements seethed round these mysterious metallic-sounding voices calling across the ether, but no words of doom or joy were caught by my ears on the outer edge of these throngs of middle-class folk; only railway time-tables, revealing a steady improvement of passenger service on all lines.

I was at a “loose end” out there at Hammersmith. Most of my friends were either busy on volunteer work—I had offered my own services as a special constable, but the authorities had decided not to entrust me with a truncheon—or were cut off from town by the difficulties of travel, despite the more frequent running of trains up to ten o'clock at night. Southlands, I heard, was acting as recruiting officer in his county town. Those young people who used to invade my rooms or drag me out to

their milder orgies were all scattered and busy. After the night in my rooms even Jocelyn had disappeared, before breakfast next morning, on some secret purpose of his own. My nephew Mervyn had had a three-line paragraph in one of the broadsheets which appeared in the place of a daily paper, recording his assistance in bringing the Plymouth express to Paddington, two hours late but without running off the rails. The engine driver was a well-known racing motorist, with a monocle in his right eye and a pair of blue overalls. I felt lonely and hipped. Even my dear Elizabeth was no use to me now as a hostess with a "loud speaker," having gone down to her night refuge where she was feeding the unemployed. Lettice was serving amateur 'bus drivers when they came off duty in the canteen at Chiswick. . . . Chiswick? I wasn't very far from Chiswick. Why not drop in at that canteen and beg a cup of coffee from the charming hand of that niece of mine, who never hesitated to demand light refreshments in my rooms at Whitehall Court, at most unholy hours of the night?

Looking back now upon this narrative I have written about the younger crowd in England, I am glad that I had that glimpse of Lettice and her canteen on the night before the ending of the General Strike. It was in a way the vindication of that post-war youth of which I have been both critic and champion. At least it was a proof that if spirit is wanted, courage, gaiety, service for something outside their own selfishness, and the old quality of adventure, they have enough and to spare.

The canteen was in the headquarters of the General Omnibus Company. There was a long buffet at one end of a garage with whitewashed walls, and trestles and tables had been placed in rows, making the place look like a monks' refectory. But it was not monastic otherwise. Lettice and some comely wenches of her own age and class were busy with the coffee urns, soup tureens, and food supplies. They were dressed in linen overalls, like waitresses in a working-man's chop-house, and for some reason or other this costume suited them admirably, I thought. Lettice certainly looked charming, like a demure Puritan maid, and her tall, slim figure was never more alluring than when she stood behind that counter or flitted between the lines of tables.

It was shortly before ten o'clock at night, and most of the

omnibuses had finished their last journeys on the streets. Their drivers and conductors were tired and hungry. They came through the swing doors, taking off their felt hats and smoothing back their tousled hair. They were the young men in plus fours, college blazers, and other garments of social caste against whom David Swayne had raged. Here and there was an elderly man of the ex-officer type, and one astounding fellow in a tall hat and morning suit and white spats, who must have looked a strange apparition on the tail of a 'bus going to the Bank. They were all talking together, and laughing at their day's adventures, and the Oxford Voice was predominant in this social hubbub.

A group of them surrounded one young man with his head bandaged. There had been some dirty work in the back streets of Battersea. I overheard the words "a howling mob," followed by loud laughter. Somebody—possibly the mob—"had got it in the neck." Another group was discussing some affair at Poplar. I gathered vaguely that a lorry load of "specials" had come up in the nick of time and stopped a very nasty little riot.

"Broken bottles, old son! Nothing like a joke at the time. . . . I had the wind up properly."

Two lads further up the room were engaged in a romantic conversation, of which I could only hear an odd scrap or two.

"A vision of beauty, I assure you! Long-lashed eyes that made my spine wilt. . . . Wanted to go to High Street, Kensington. . . . And that fool Molyneux insisted on turning down Grosvenor Gardens!"

"Well, of course he's a married man. It makes a difference, they say."

"I dreamed of her, old bird! Thought I was driving her to John o'Groats. Kept on punching tickets for her, and making the little bell ring like a musical box."

They leaned up against each other, overcome by mirth.

At the counter Lettice was taking orders from these hungry customers.

"Sausages and mashed, if it isn't too much trouble?"

"Oh, thanks most frightfully. Can I have that 'mug-of-thick,' do you think?"

"My dear Peter," said Lettice, "you're not the only boy that drives a 'bus, you know. That haddock is coming—quite quickly."

"A thousand apologies," said the boy. "Didn't know I had asked for it before. And I say, Lettice, you look perfectly topping in that fancy dress!"

"I'm too busy for pretty compliments," said Lettice, unmoved by this flattery. "Go and tell Ivo to come and help us with the washing up. Millicent will drop down dead unless she gets relieved."

Lettice was tired herself, as I could see by the way she put the back of her hand up to her forehead for a moment and closed her eyes from the glare of the light.

"Let me give a helping hand," I said quietly. "I'm an intruder here, without a job."

She opened her eyes wide at the sight of me, and then laughed and gave me her hand to kiss.

"Hullo, Nunky! How splendid of you to come along to our thieves' kitchen. Isn't it amusing? All these boys are priceless—and having the time of their lives!"

"A bit tiring for them, and for you," I suggested.

"Tiring?"

She looked at me with amusement.

"The best game I've played yet!"

I told her presently—when I could get another word with her between clamorous calls for fish and chips—that I had seen Jocelyn recently. He had asked me about her anxiously.

A faint blush came into her cheeks and she avoided my eyes for a moment.

"Very kind of him, I'm sure! I suppose he's fighting in the ranks with the hooligan boys?"

"No," I said. "He's dead against this General Strike. He told me that he has no use at all for any of our little revolutionaries. He never had, my dear."

She raised her eyebrows and looked at me again.

"Honour bright, Nunky? Did he say that? Glad tidings, I'm sure!"

"He's one of our idealists," I said, "and desperately in love with you, my dear, in spite of all your cruelty."

"Those mouth organs!" she answered, and laughed on a note of mirth at a humorous memory of hers.

I stayed there for two hours or more, until most of the crowd had cleared away. Ivo Tremayne was sitting down with Lettice and me having a little meal, now that the hardest work was done. The other girls were at another table with a few tired 'bus-conductors. Only a stray lorry driver from long distance journeys came in on the chance of getting some hot drink and a late meal.

"I'm too tired to eat!" said Lettice, and she leaned her head against Ivo's shoulder.

"If this strike goes on much longer," said Ivo, "there'll be the fairest victim of them all."

"Tired, but wonderfully amused," said Lettice. "I like waiting on those ridiculous boys. Anyone would think that driving omnibuses through London slums is as good as hunting on a March morning."

"It's the meaning behind it," said Ivo.

"*'There's nothing on earth so lowly but duty giveth it importance. No station so degrading but is ennobled by obedience.'*"

He laughed quietly at this quotation from some corner cupboard of his memory.

"We've got to beat the strikers," said Lettice presently, "but I can't help feeling sorry for the poor dears. I think their self-control is marvellous. Seeing all their jobs being done by our crowd must be rather galling, don't you think?"

"Yes, I take my hat off to them," said Ivo. "I wish our crowd had the same kind of loyalty to each other. I can't see Lord Rothermere giving up his millions because Lord Beaverbrook is threatened with a lower standard of life. . . . Seriously, I think a lot of the British working man since I've signed on as a 'bus driver."

I listened to this chatter and it reminded me strangely of a conversation among some wounded officers after the first day of the Somme battles.

"Those German machine-gunners are topping fellows!"

"Perfectly marvellous. Came out into the open and waited for us."

Ivo Tremayne, fighting the General Strike, took off his hat to the strikers. Lettice, my intolerant Lettice, so haughty, so

steeped in class tradition, could not help being sorry for the "poor dears." It would be fine if somehow we could make use of this good-nature, this chivalry to our opponents in the game, this national spirit of fair play. How great would England be again if all classes would get together in that spirit for common service! So I thought as I listened to my tired niece, and Ivo her friend, in that canteen down Chiswick way.

And then, suddenly, I saw Lettice sit up with a swift alertness in her eyes, like a startled bird.

It was when one of those dirty, grease-stained lorry drivers came through the door, taking his cap off, and wiping the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

It was Jocelyn Pomeroy, travel-stained, a little dazed, I thought, as he stood there in the hot room, with its glare of light making his eyes blink after the dark roads.

"Comrade Trotsky!" said Lettice.

She sprang from her chair and went towards him.

"Hullo, Lettice," said Jocelyn, in his casual way. "I suppose I'm a bit late for a cup of coffee?"

"Never too late for those who serve England," said Lettice, graciously, but a little mocking.

Jocelyn glanced round the room and saw Ivo and me, and raised his hand to us in greeting.

"Quite a family party!" he remarked.

"In your honour, Jocelyn," said Lettice, untruthfully. "Waiting for the return of the Prodigal Son. We can't do the fatted calf for you, but how about sausages and mashed?"

"I could do with some," said Jocelyn. "But I'll have to go on tick."

"No charge for loyal volunteers," said Lettice. "What's your branch of service?"

Jocelyn smiled at her.

"Nothing heroic," he confessed. "Driving milk from Warwickshire to London. Mostly for the hospitals. Warranted free from political microbes."

"The milk of human kindness!" said Lettice. "Pass, friend. You're one of us. . . . We're glad you're back, Jocelyn!"

She held out her hand to him, as though welcoming him back to her side of life.

"Thanks for this kind reception," he said, politely. "Did I hear something about 'sausages and mashed'?"

Lettice looked at him and laughed.

"I am holding out my hand," she said. "Comrade Pomeroy!"

He took his right hand out of his trouser pocket and looked at it doubtfully.

"Hardly possible," he remarked humbly. "I haven't washed for twelve hours."

"Honest dirt!" said Lettice carelessly. "But if your hands are grubby, my face is clean."

She leaned towards him and offered him her cheek.

I saw his face flush at this good offer. A sudden light leapt into his eyes, and he laughed as though not quite sure of his luck.

"Is that quite fair on Ivo?" he asked.

"Perfectly fair, old man," said Ivo. "I haven't got a look in with you and Lettice. Never had, alas!"

"Good Lord!" said Jocelyn. "You don't say so!"

Lettice took hold of his hands, dirty as they were, and leaned towards him again, and kissed him on the lips before us all, and didn't seem to mind the laughter of her friends. . . . These post-war girls!"

The General Strike was over next day. Herbert Bradshaw had "crawled"—with some others, courageous in surrender of a weapon that cut into their conscience. The coal strike which was the cause of it all dragged on wearily, and all the Comrade Chicks led the miners to the edge of ruin, with a stubborn stupidity, a folly of leadership, a loathsome acceptance of foreign money docked from the miserable wages of Russian labour, until their loud-mouthed threats ended in a whine. The owners, on their side, were narrow, uncompromising, unhelpful to the nation. The disaster of it all to British trade has not yet been added up in the bill of costs. The folly of it has heaped new burdens on the people. And yet the memory of that General Strike remains as a chapter in social history not without profit to us all.

We stood revealed to the whole world and to ourselves as a people whose spirit is still high and splendid. In no other

nation in the world, I think, could such a thing have happened without bloodshed and anarchy. No shot was fired from first to last. The strikers were as well-behaved as those who took their places for a time or rallied up in defence of ancient liberties. The good-nature of our people staggered the imagination of our friends and enemies. And something else was proved, worth proving. That youth of ours—these Mervyns and Jocelyns and Lettices of post-war England—so harshly criticised, so careless of criticism, such rebels against authority, so reckless of convention, so self-assured, played the game according to the rules, and in the spirit of the old tradition.

It was Elizabeth Pomeroy who summed it all up.

"The younger crowd!" she said, on that day when the strike ended. "What's wrong with them, I should like to know? What's wrong with England when we have such spirit? . . . If only we could pull together!"

THE END

